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THE PRESIDENT OF QUEX



There was a tenseness of the atmosphere which betokened the coming excitement. — *Page 15.*

The President of Quex

A WOMAN'S CLUB STORY

59-217

BY

HELEN M. WINSLOW

FORMER EDITOR OF "THE CLUB WOMAN"

gs

ILLUSTRATED BY W. L. JACOBS

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NOTED

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

NOTED

Norwood Press
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Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

To

Sarah Platt Decker

*A woman who has accomplished much more than the
heroine of the following pages:*

*And who exemplifies, in her splendid public work and
her ideal home relations, the best type of
the modern club woman.*

President of Quex

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THE PRESIDENT OF QUEX

CHAPTER I.

“ I TELL you, we must find a new candidate,” said the most energetic woman in the group. “ Otherwise, Cordelia Graham will leave no stone unturned, and first we know she’ll get it.”

“ With her record? ” asked another, with that indescribable circumflex on the pronoun that condemns a woman almost as surely as a ticket-of-leave from a House of Refuge.

The energetic woman laughed shortly — disagreeably.

“ That doesn’t count. I remember hearing Jennie June say that the worst of women with pasts was that they were never

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content with them, but were invariably bound to deal in futures. Here we have a case."

"As I see it," said an elderly woman, "Cordelia Graham is canvassing everywhere and everybody for votes for herself as president of Quex. She is not the woman we want."

"Oh, no!" came a chorus of long-drawn whispers.

"Why not?" came the clear tone of a woman who had not spoken before.

Nobody answered. Innuendoes are easy. Definite accusations are different.

"Mrs. Graham is an able woman, a handsome woman, a gracious and dignified woman," the clear tone went on; "why not?"

"But," began the energetic woman, "have you not heard?"

"Heard what?" persisted the last speaker.

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“W-why — things,” was the evasive reply.

This argument seemed unanswerable, and there was no reply for a moment. Then:

“The presidency of Quex ought not to go a-begging,” muttered the retiring secretary.

“Nor yet ought it to be begged for,” added the treasurer.

“But, ladies, the right person must be found and prevailed upon to take it. Prevailed upon, I say,” continued the elderly lady. “For, somehow, the woman who wants most to be president of a club is often the least fitted for the position.”

“Can you think of anybody, Mrs. Blake?” asked the treasurer.

“Yes, I can; but she might not consent. What do you say to Nancy Phayre?”

A moment’s silence; a chorus of “A-ahs,” and then, “Fine,” “Splendid,” “All right.”

“No; she wouldn’t take it.”

“Yes; I think she would.”

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“It’s just this way,” Mrs. Blake went on, “she is young, popular, rich, and has no home ties. She is handsome; she has magnetism; she’s a born leader if I’m any judge of character; there’s real stuff in her. And we’ve got to put up a strong candidate to beat the Graham forces.”

“But Nancy Phayre will never take it; she’s heart-broken,” said her dearest friend.

“You mean she thinks she is,” answered Mrs. Blake. “She’s lost her baby and her mother and her husband. At present life is a blank to her. But she needs the club as much as, or more than we need her. If she’d let her name be used, we could put her in the president’s chair. Once there, she’d make the club what it never was, even in its best days. And it would be the best possible medicine for her. What do you say?”

“I move we make Mrs. Blake chairman of



“Life is over for me,” she told herself for the thousandth time. — *Page 5.*

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the present committee to go to Mrs. Phayre and labor with her," said the friend.

The motion was carried, and when the caucus broke up Cordelia Graham had cause to fear for her presidential boomlet.

Nancy Phayre sat disconsolately beside her rather hopeless-looking grate, and gazed dejectedly at the black lumps of anthracite, which refused the brightness of the fire that tried to smolder under them.

"Life is over for me," she told herself for the thousandth time. "And I'm not thirty yet. Ah, me!"

She leaned her head on her hand again and dropped into a more listless attitude than before. Her baby's death ten months before had seemed at the time an unbearable sorrow. Three weeks later the sudden demise of her mother, whom she would not forsake even when she married, had doubled her burden

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of grief. But it was when, only six months ago, she had turned away from the grave of her devoted husband and come back to this big, empty house, that she had known "sorrow's crown of sorrow," and had succumbed to the giant Despair. Shutting herself away from all her friends, with two or three exceptions, she gave herself up to the numbness of utter bereavement, the depth of grief, making no attempt whatever to rally her forces, mental or physical, from the shock. Day after day she sat here brooding, alone in listless sorrow, absorbed in her selfish grief. The friends who had known Nancy Phayre as the gay, debonair, hopeful, buoyant wife of the popular Colonel Phayre, would not have recognized her in this dejected woman sitting alone by a dying grate.

A distant bell rang somewhere, but beyond a shade of annoyance that flitted across her face she heeded it not. It was when a

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maid entered silently and came swiftly toward her, bringing — had she but known it — the herald of a new life, with the bit of white pasteboard on a silver tray, that she turned.

“ But I told you I wanted to see none of them,” said Mrs. Phayre.

“ Yes'm,” replied the maid. “ I tell them all so; but this one would not be turned away; and she said would you be good enough to read what she has written? ”

Nancy took up the card, on which was engraved,

“ MRS. LEXINGTON BLAKE ”

according to the most approved style. She turned it over and read :

“ My Dear : — Don't turn me away ; I was your mother's dearest friend. I have something to say to you. ”

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“Tell her to please come up here,” and she motioned the girl away.

“Miss Dean is with her,” said the maid, retreating; but Nancy Phayre did not seem to notice anything more until the draperies were brushed aside from the hallway and Félicie Dean came breezily in, for she belonged to the type of woman who can do nothing silently — not even enter the chamber of sorrow.

“How do you do, dear?” she began. “Mercy me! how you’ve aged — changed, I mean.” But she softened the words by taking Nancy in her arms and kissing her before handing her on to Mrs. Blake; and while the elder woman was giving her greeting, the newcomer had seized the blower and attacked the grate.

“You don’t half keep a fire,” she observed, cheerfully. “By the time you’ve kept Spinster Hall as long as I have, you won’t

hug a black grate." But Mrs. Phayre was already sitting on a big, comfortable sofa with both Mrs. Blake's hands clasping one of hers.

"You shouldn't stay indoors so much," the older one was saying. "I promised your mother years ago to 'mother' you if the time ever came when you needed me. I think it is here now — isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. It doesn't matter; nothing matters now," said Nancy, drooping again.

"Come now," began Félicie, coming over and taking the other slender hand. "That isn't going to do; I'll take you out at once in my auto if you talk like that."

But Mrs. Blake patted the hand she held for a little while in silence.

"Oh, if I could *do* something — anything else but think — think — *think*," Nancy cried. "I am so lonely — so grief-stricken,

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so wretched. Why must all this happen to me? Why did — ”

“ Hush, dear,” and Mrs. Blake’s tones were very gentle. “ We all have to go through sorrow’s fires at some time.” And Nancy Phayre remembered suddenly a time when she was a girl, when Mrs. Blake had been in widow’s weeds, too; and that some had feared for her reason.

“ We must either give way to our griefs and let sorrow crush us,” pursued Mrs. Blake, gently, “ or we must crush sorrow. The time has come for you to decide which it is to be.”

“ But how can I help it? ” cried Nancy. “ In this great house — surrounded by memories and alone — I can think of nothing else.”

“ Why stay here, then? Why live alone with your thoughts? ” was the reply.

“ But, Mrs. Blake, what can I do? ”

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“Get out into the world again. No, don’t look surprised. The world looks on these things differently from what it used,” said Mrs. Blake. “Forgive me if I say that it seems to me selfish to shut ourselves away from a world that needs so much help.”

“You are right, there,” interrupted Félicie. “The day has gone by when a woman is justified in draping herself in the habiliments of woe and sitting down to enjoy them.”

“She means all right,” said Mrs. Blake, in answer to Nancy’s pained expression. “But the poet put it better when he sung about the ‘luxury of grief.’ You know there is danger that we lose sight of the woe and the tremendous need of the world in nursing our own sorrows.”

“And we’ve come,” pursued Félicie, brightly, “to open the door outward for you — to give you an excuse.”

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“Quex is in a bad way,” Mrs. Blake explained. “Mrs. Amidon’s term is out in January, and we are looking for a candidate.” She paused significantly, but Mrs. Phayre did not grasp her meaning.

“We’ve come to beg the use of your name,” said Mrs. Blake.

“Me? — *I*? Why, dear Mrs. Blake, it is impossible,” gasped Nancy; “I’m in mourning.”

“That does not count,” Mrs. Blake answered. “Club life is not society. Women in mourning are everywhere in club work; and an excellent thing it is for them, too.”

“But, Mrs. Blake, it seems disrespectful to George — and to mother,” objected Nancy.

“Think a minute. If George were here, would he not be the first to counsel you to get away from yourself — to go out into the world? And your mother, would she not

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have urged you to accept the presidency of Quex? ”

“ Dear me, Nan,” put in Félicie ; “ I wish they’d offer it to me once. They wouldn’t have a second chance. Take it, Nan. To paraphrase Shakspeare, ‘ Range with humble club-women in content, not be perked up in a glistering grief, while you wear a golden sorrow.’ ”

“ You know what Doctor Johnson said, ‘ Sorrow is the mere rust of the soul,’ ” added Mrs. Blake. “ ‘ Activity will cleanse and brighten it.’ Come, say yes.”

“ I shall have to think of it a little,” said Mrs. Phayre.

Five minutes later the two committee-women were going down the stone steps in the November sunshine.

“ I’ll wager a hat she won’t take it,” said Félicie Dean. “ She’s settling into the habit of lonesomeness.”

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“If I were taking wagers, I’d risk this one,” laughed Mrs. Blake. “She’s too active and healthy-minded a woman.”

And the two climbed into Félicie’s auto and rolled down the avenue.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN "election-day" came, upward of two hundred members of Quex were gathered in the hall where all their meetings were held, and there was a tenseness of the atmosphere which betokened the coming excitement. Party feeling had run high for a month, and to-day the most commonplace greetings seemed charged with electric meanings. When it became known that Nancy Phayre had consented to be a candidate, Mrs. Graham redoubled her efforts to attain the presidential chair, leaving no stone unturned that might be used to erect an imposing monument of votes. It was noticeable that many women were present who had never before been seen at a business meeting — for, previous to this epoch in its history,

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Quex had been chiefly a literary and social club, and the business meetings had been sparsely attended. The retiring president had been a quiet, amiable lady of the old school, who had helped lay out a course of study each year, and presided over its resultant papers and discussions with old-fashioned dignity and precision, but with a notable lack of the best parliamentary usages. She had been the founder of the club, and the members had been content to let their beloved president lead them carefully into the shallows of literature according to the methods of women's clubs of years ago. But the time was changing more rapidly, even, than the members of Quex were aware. And with the retirement of Mrs. Amidon, on the plea of delicate health, which, as Félicie Dean put it, was "French for advancing age," the old club was preparing for a new lease of life.

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A spirit of eagerness for fresh methods and real work underlay their outward curiosity as to the coming election, and, provided the right leader could be found, Quex was ready to take its place in the foremost ranks of clubdom.

But where should this right leader be found? Cordelia Graham had been a resident of the city four years. She had come back from London and claimed to be of Southern birth and extraction. A widow, young, handsome, and with a suggestion about her of familiarity with wealth and leisure and good society, she seemed to have money enough to live on, although the gossips had been unable to learn whence it came. But with all her charm — and charm she undeniably had — there was a certain atmosphere about her which created misgivings among the older and more conservative women. Her early

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life was shrouded in mystery; her antecedents were vague; her "visible means of support" not sufficiently plain to the ordinary mind. There was nothing really to be set down against her, and yet, as the committee-woman had intimated, there were "things said."

Nancy Phayre, on the contrary, had grown up among the best society the city afforded. Her father had been a leading lawyer; her grandfather a judge. As a girl she had been much sought after, and as the wife of George Phayre, she had been a leader in the young set. And although her membership in Quex had been little more than nominal, the conservative element of the club felt a sense of pride and elation in her nomination.

As for Mrs. Phayre herself, she felt many misgivings, once having consented to take the nomination, and sitting in her darkened rooms to-day, she half hoped to hear of Mrs.

Graham's election. Not so Mrs. Graham. She had marshalled all her forces and had them grouped together on one side of the room, with one or two leading spirits electioneering among the doubtful ones. It was even whispered about on the conservative side that the fair Southerner had even gone so far as to pay the railroad fares of certain up-State women who were now making their first appearance at a business meeting of Quex.

When Mrs. Amidon called the meeting to order, ten minutes after the scheduled hour, she was nervous, and showed plainly her dread of the coming ordeal. The routine business of secretary's reports was hurried through in perfunctory fashion, while the zest of impatience filled the air, causing the audience to seethe and palpitate with half-suppressed emotion. Surely, never had Quex, with its cut-and-dried board of

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officers, reëlected from year to year, experienced anything like this.

When the nominating committee's report was called for, a pin-fall would have disturbed the audience. The chairman was pale and her hand shook as she read her report — not the concise and formal affair we know to-day in model clubs, but an ornate, apologetic appeal for her candidates.

“Your committee have given deep thought and prayerful consideration to the matter in hand,” she read from a shaking manuscript. “They have had many names suggested from which to choose those best fitted, in their judgment, to fill the offices about to become vacant. As all the old board are to go out, we feel that upon our decision to-day hangs the future of Quex. We have an honorable name as one of the oldest clubs in the country — a literary club that has done much good work, but has hid its modest

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light under a bushel. Momentous, then, shall be the result of our deliberations to-day. In choosing our new officers, we may light a candle that shall cast its beams around the world, or we may extinguish the tiny rushlight we have carried so modestly under our beloved retiring president. In choosing our leaders, then, we have had many anxious consultations, and many important questions to decide. We have done our best. We have chosen from our finest. We trust you will accept this report, in the spirit we give it; that our election may be harmonious —”

“Madam President, I object,” called out a woman from the Graham side. “We do not want an address; we want our list of nominees to work on.”

But Mrs. Amidon only looked distressed and confused, and the chairman went on:

“— harmonious, and that all will work together in the future as in the past to make

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Quex an honor to our membership. Madam President, I have the honor to present the following list of nominees.”

And she read a long and formidable roll of names, beginning with “Mrs. Nancy Phayre, president.”

When she had finished everything was in confusion, and three women jumped to their feet. One moved to accept the nominating committee’s report; one seconded the motion, and the third, who spoke loudest of all, gained the greatest amount of attention.

“Madam President,” she cried, “this is unfair. We should have had a minority report or two candidates for the leading offices. Madam President, no one here more fully recognizes the ability and social position of the lady whose name has been presented for the presidency of Quex; but I wish to offer you another candidate — a woman who is capable, tactful, and a born leader — one

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who will grace the position in the eyes of the world and know how to place Quex at the very forefront of women's clubs in America. Ladies, I take pride in presenting the name of Mrs. Cordelia Graham for president of Quex."

She, too, sat down in a storm of applause.

Then Mrs. Lexington Blake rose to her feet, and something in her calm, sweet face, framed in its wealth of white hair, compelled the restless crowd into quiet.

"Madam President, as the chairman of our committee has intimated, Quex stands to-day at the parting of the ways. We may make, or we may irreparably mar, the future of our beloved club by our action at this meeting; and while I acknowledge the superior abilities of the nominee from the floor, and cheerfully accord to her the eulogium which the last speaker has pronounced, I desire to go on record as advocating the candidacy of one

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whom we have known from her babyhood; one who adds to the personal charm of grace and beauty and refinement and education all those rarer qualifications that go to make up a leader. Madam President, I desire to second the motion most heartily for Nancy Phayre," and she, too, sat down amid a storm of kid-gloved applause that rustled through the room like a summer shower upon the roof.

"Madam President," began two others in unison; but they were interrupted by a third:

"There is a motion before the house, Madam President."

"Two of them," added another.

Mrs. Amidon looked from one to another in despair.

"Motion to accept the nominating committee's report," whispered the secretary.

"A motion has been made and seconded

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that the report of the nominating committee be accepted," said Mrs. Amidon. "All in favor of —"

"I object," called out a would-be parliamentarian from the back of the room. "There is another motion to nominate Mrs. Graham before the house."

"There was no motion; only a proposition," called another.

"Madam President," and Mrs. Graham rose to her feet. "Do we understand that in accepting the nominating committee's report we elect the list of candidates?"

Mrs. Amidon looked perplexed.

"I think so," she answered, pink as her dainty bonnet-strings.

"Certainly not," and Mrs. Blake rose to her feet again. "It becomes necessary to accept the report and discharge your committee before you can vote on this list."

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“Will Mrs. Blake please come to the chair?” interrupted Mrs. Amidon, as a drowning woman might grasp at a straw. And she yielded the gavel to her vice-president more cheerfully than she had done anything else that day.

When Mrs. Blake seated herself, a wave of calmness swept across the room, her strong personality controlling the warring forces. With a sense of leadership, the audience settled itself again into something like order.

“The motion to accept this report is before you,” said Mrs. Blake. “After that, nominations from the floor will be heard.”

Cheered by this sign of justice and reasonableness, the “opposition” allowed the necessary vote to be taken.

“Nominations from the floor, for any or all the officers, are in order,” said Mrs. Blake, who had not only studied her parliamentary law books, but, by virtue of being stock-

holder in several large corporations, had seen the way men handle such matters.

“I can only reiterate what I have said about Mrs. Graham,” said the woman who had already put her candidate forward.

“The secretary will enter Mrs. Graham’s nomination,” said Mrs. Blake; and this spirit of fairness did more to win friends for her side than she knew. “Are there any others?”

The names of other candidates were offered for the secretary’s and treasurer’s places — inspired, as everybody knew, by Mrs. Graham’s desire to have her personal friends associated with her, in case she won.

“If there are no other nominations,” said Mrs. Blake, waiting a little, “I will declare the list closed, and we will proceed to the election. Mrs. Corey, Mrs. Vanderhoof, and Miss Dean, will you distribute the ballots, and act as tellers afterward?” and she sat

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down in the blest consciousness of duty well performed.

Again excitement rose to concert pitch, and enthusiasm gathered to itself every member as the wind that precedes a thunder-storm catches and swirls along every stray leaf and loose straw.

“How will it go?” the secretary asked of Mrs. Blake.

“Mrs. Graham’ll get it,” answered the treasurer, with more confidence than politeness. “She’s got votes enough promised, and came here to-day sure of success.”

“As witness their confident expression,” retorted the secretary. “But what do *you* think, Mrs. Blake?”

But that wise woman only smiled. In her heart she was fearful for Nancy Phayre’s chance of winning, but she would have died rather than acknowledge Mrs. Graham’s supremacy one moment before she must.

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“Have all voted who are entitled to the privilege?” she asked, bringing her gavel down so forcibly that the ink-bottle seemed to partake of the general excitement and fairly danced on its stand. “If so, the tellers will please collect the votes and retire to the anteroom.”

When her orders had been obeyed, and the few items of unfinished business and of minor importance which had been postponed were brought forward, there was scarcely interest enough to effect the necessary votes.

“If ever an item needs to be railroaded through a meeting,” said one woman, wise in her club day and generation, “manage to have it brought up for consideration while the tellers are out. Women will vote almost anything without opposition, while they are awaiting the tellers’ report.”

There was a ten-minute recess, however,

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before Mrs. Corey made her appearance, and then the members dropped into their seats, as Félicie expressed it, "like one woman."

"We will listen to the tellers' report," announced Mrs. Blake. And Mrs. Corey, in her clear, strong voice, began:

"For president:

Cordelia Graham, 73 votes;

Nancy Phayre, 163 votes."

"Mrs. Phayre is declared elected," said Mrs. Blake. The surprised audience broke into a cheer, for even the most sanguine of Nancy Phayre's supporters had not expected this. And they could scarcely wait for the tellers' report to finish the list originally presented by the nominating committee, before adjournment, and the chance to "talk it over."

But before Mrs. Blake could hand her gavel back to Mrs. Amidon and ask her to

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adjourn the meeting for the last time, Cordelia Graham was on her feet:

“I move, Madam President,” she began in a sweet, high-pitched voice, “that Mrs. Phayre’s election be made unanimous, and that in welcoming her to the chair we tender our regrets to the retiring president, and our thanks for her long and faithful service.”

“Game to the last,” muttered Félicie Dean, smilingly, to one of her friends, where they stood in the door. “I wonder just what her tack will be.”

CHAPTER III.

NANCY PHAYRE had not attended the business meeting, preferring, from a feeling that good taste demanded it, to stay quietly by her library fire. She would not even telephone her friends for news of the election, telling herself that she did not care a fig if it went against her. But she did feel a thrill of exultation when Mrs. Blake entered about five o'clock, followed by her friend, Félicie, calling out from the hall:

“ Well, Nan, you're ‘ it ’ now, elected on the first ballot. The Graham forces were utterly routed.

“ ‘ I don't know what 'twas all about,
But 'twas a mighty victory. ’ ”



“ I think I *would* rather win than lose.” — *Page* 33.

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“ My dear, I congratulate you,” said Mrs. Blake as Nancy came forward to greet them. “ One hundred and sixty-three votes; ninety majority.”

“ Good,” exclaimed Mrs. Phayre, with something of her old spirit. “ Since I went in for it, I think I *would* rather win than lose.”

“ Characteristic,” Miss Dean retorted. “ You wouldn’t be Nancy Phayre otherwise. No; we’re not going to sit down.”

“ You’re coming home with me to dinner, Nancy,” said Mrs. Blake. “ No; don’t refuse. I’m alone, and shall have nobody but you and Félicie and Hope Norton. My horses are at the door. Order yours for nine and get into your wraps.” And before Mrs. Phayre realized what she was doing, they were shutting the door to the carriage and whirling up the avenue.

It was the first time she had been out for

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weeks, and the change was undeniably exhilarating. Mrs. Blake's beautiful home had never looked more inviting — although it had been, as she had laughingly asserted, her "second home" always. The warm welcome lifted her out of the dreary mood that was fast becoming a second nature, and she fell to discussing plans for the future of Quex as eagerly as if she had made them her chief study for years. Just before dinner was announced Miss Norton came in — a tall, dark-eyed young woman who occupied a position on the leading newspaper of the city.

"You forget that I have never met Mrs. Phayre," she said, after a moment's hesitation. But when the two women clasped hands a moment later and looked into one another's eyes, each knew she had found a staunch friend. Occasionally it is so; and kindred souls come together in close association, each appropriating to itself instantly all the

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tenderness and truth and strength of the other.

As the dinner was served the talk ran on club work and prospects.

“ *I feel,*” said Mrs. Phayre, “ that Quex has spent hours enough on the study of Greek art and Robert Browning’s poems and Dante’s ‘ *Inferno.*’ ”

“ Yes; they are all dead,” said Félicie, mournfully. “ Dante was a good man, though rather daft on Beatrice; but there are more live issues to-day. Think of wasting four mortal years on Dante.”

“ That was well enough at the time,” answered Mrs. Blake, “ and I shall always contend that these years that club-women have devoted to purely literary effort — ”

“ ‘ *Literary effort* ’ is good,” put in Nancy, saucily; but Mrs. Blake only smiled and went on :

“ There should be a new proverb to fit the

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times: Many are they who shall pursue literature, but few there be who overtake it. Those were the years when we were finding ourselves; when we learned the sound of our own voices; when we learned to tolerate the opinions of other women; when we were growing a desire to do more active and valuable work in the world. Women have not been coming into their own with a jump; we've been working up to it gradually ever since Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Stanton and those others started the ball rolling nearly fifty years ago. You shall not laugh at our little efforts now."

"Nor would we, Mrs. Blake," said Miss Norton. "We younger women — we of to-day — take things for granted altogether too much. We do not stop to consider how much we owe to the small beginnings, the opening of little doors that have been going on for several decades before our time."

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“But what do you propose to do about the club?” pursued Félicie, turning to Mrs. Phayre.

“What *shall* we do with it?” asked Nancy, in return, appealing to all. “I scarcely know. But it is work I want; not past issues. I’ve read so much in your column,” turning to Hope, “about what other clubs are doing in sociology and education and civics and all that. There must be something in our city that needs attention and intelligent effort. What is it?”

“May I suggest?” asked Hope.

“Why, certainly,” answered the new president. “You’re a member of Quex; why not?”

“The child-labor problem, then, needs looking after,” began Miss Norton.

“What — here? In this city?” asked Mrs. Phayre.

“Here in this city,” replied Hope, with a

queer little smile. "And there are no women as matrons in our police-stations. There is need of closer connection and sympathy between school-teachers and mothers; there should be a raise in the salary of women teachers; the public parks should be better cared for; and when all this is done, there is plenty more."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Nancy Phayre, bracing herself. "Won't you come to the next meeting with some definite plan in mind? Mrs. Blake, too; you'll have *something* to say?"

"I don't know," laughed the elder woman. "I belong to a past generation; I'm of the variety of club-women that studies the poetry of the Renaissance."

"As if," retorted Félicie, as they rose from the table, "you'd let any sort of good work go on and you not be in it."

"That's the beautiful feature of threescore

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to-day," said Miss Norton. "Accumulation of years no longer makes a woman old. 'A woman's as young as she looks' is an out-of-date proverb now. It's 'a woman is as young as she does.'"

And then Mrs. Phayre's carriage was at the door, and good-bys were said. But Nancy Phayre's waking hours that night were not so lonely nor her weight of woe so pressing as usual. For she had found that blessed balm for sorrow that heals rich and poor alike — something to do.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mrs. Phayre walked in and took possession of the chair at the next meeting of Quex, however, she had no settled policy nor definite scheme of work, in mind; only an eagerness for work that often characterizes the young club-woman and which makes of her, with wisely directed effort, a power for good. Her heart palpitated with love for her kind as the audience welcomed her with such clapping of hands as made her progress like a triumphal march.

Aside from her few personal friends, she had not cared much for women before, and this was the beginning of a new love for and understanding of her sex. She had trembled

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somewhat, in a figurative sense, at the thought of opening her first meeting, but this appreciative welcome put her at her ease immediately, and she soon found herself wielding the gavel like one to the manner born. Since election day she had been studying her parliamentary manual, and she managed the routine business most creditably. It was evident that Mrs. Blake's predictions were to come true and that she was a born leader.

There was a large attendance, every member feeling that Quex was about to bestir itself for some definite work. But no particular interest was manifest until the new president came to the item "New business."

When she rose to her feet, every eye in the room was on her, critically, expectantly, affectionately.

"My friends," she began, "before taking up any plan of work, I want to thank you

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for the honor you have done me in placing me in this chair. How much I appreciate it will be shown, I trust, by the way I perform its duties and develop its opportunities. That is the word we want to dwell upon, ladies," and she made a little pause, "*opportunities*. I am sure there are plenty; let us find them. What have you to suggest?" Whereupon Hope Norton rose to her feet and made an impassioned plea for the little children employed in factories and stores, telling of their hardships and miseries.

"This club can start the ball rolling for better child-labor laws," she said in closing. "I move, Madam President, that we have a committee appointed to investigate this work."

"I would add to that," said Mrs. Blake, as Hope sat down, "to consult with our representatives about framing a bill to be presented to the next Legislature."

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“ Beg pardon, Madam President, but there is already a bill,” added Hope, rising again. “ There was an investigation by the Presbyterian Synod last year. They discovered that many children are allowed to work in this State under twelve; a bill has been framed raising this age limit to fourteen, and calculated to enforce the law. I will amend my former motion, so that the committee shall attend the hearing at the Legislature.”

“ Madam President,” came next from the sweet, high-pitched treble of Mrs. Graham, “ I hope we may go with this matter very seriously. I trust that every one of us will be willing to do everything in our power to stop this child labor — even if it interferes with our own incomes. Madam President, I move that this committee consist of six; and that you shall be one of that number.”

“ Motion already before the house,”

called the parliamentary member, and Nancy said graciously:

“In a moment, Mrs. Graham.” The motion was put and carried, and then the second motion being in order it was carried also, by unanimous vote.

“I was sure,” said Mrs. Graham, to Mrs. Phayre, at the close of the meeting, “*you* would want to go on that committee. Your presence in the legislative chamber would carry weight, you know; not only as the president of Quex, but as a heavy stockholder in some of our leading mills. But what if they should challenge your own factories?” she added, as if by afterthought.

“Oh, we have nothing of that sort at the Sphinx Mills,” said Nancy, confidently.

“Indeed? So glad to hear it,” and the woman passed on; but the peculiar arch to her eyebrows as she did so stayed with Nancy Phayre all night. And the next



“You must put Mrs. Graham on your child-labor committee.” — Page 45.

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morning she had decided on a plan of action.

“George Phayre would never have allowed anything wrong in any mill he was superintendent of,” she told herself, bravely.

“Neither would my father, in a factory where he was the heaviest stockholder. But just to get over the insinuation in that woman’s voice and eyes I’m going through the mills this very day.”

But she did not carry her resolve into effect for the reason that Mrs. Blake came in and they went down-town together.

“You must put Mrs. Graham on your child-labor committee,” said the elder woman over their luncheon. “She seems much interested in it.”

A queer expression passed over Nancy’s face. “I do not like her,” she said at length. “I do not believe in her. Why, then, must I put her on important committees?”

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“ Because, Nancy dear, it is policy to do so,” answered Mrs. Blake.

“ But why isn’t it better to ignore women of whom one doesn’t approve? ” objected the new president. “ Surely there are plenty of others who will make quite as good workers, and be less objectionable to me.”

“ My dear, one of the first things a club president has to learn,” returned the other, “ is that she must lay aside her personal likes and dislikes in the club. If there is anything to be learned from the successful politician of to-day, it is that lesson. How long would he remain at the head of his district, or his party, if he ignored his enemies and put forward none but personal friends? And while we need not adopt his methods, we may, at least, note the wisdom he displays in making his enemies serve him.”

Mrs. Phayre made a wry face and

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crumbled a biscuit beside her plate; but she made no answer.

“The successful club president will not only placate her enemies, if such exist, by offering them an occasional bonbon in the way of committeeship, but she will use all the tact she possesses to win their friendship,” Mrs. Blake continued. “It is not your fault if Mrs. Graham does not love you now; but it will be if she does not, at least, tolerate you a year from now. And I want to see you reelected next season — unanimously.”

Nancy looked up and smiled.

“Aren’t you just the best second mother a young and silly woman could possibly have?” she said. “I’ll be good now; Cordelia Graham goes on that committee; but so do you. Yes, and Hope Norton — she’s so well posted — and Félicie — do you think she’ll feel hurt if she isn’t put on?”

Mrs. Blake smiled. “Hasn’t my little

preachment had more effect than that? You couldn't possibly select a more unsuitable person for the child-labor committee than Félicie Dean — bright and charming as she is. No. Put her on the reception committee if you want to, where her beauty and good clothes and fascinating manner will count for all they're worth. But remember that Mrs. Graham will do ten times as well on this one."

"And yet you don't like Cordelia Graham any better than I do?" laughed Nancy.

"No; not as a personal friend," said the other. "But if the club doesn't broaden us enough to see the good qualities in those whom we do not love, what is all this 'associated effort' good for? So much you *must* see."

"Oh, I'm learning every day," answered Nancy, lightly. But the words stayed with her, and afterward they helped her over many a hard spot.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BLAKE was right about the efficiency of the defeated candidate on a working committee, as Nancy was obliged to acknowledge, after their first meeting at her house, when some plan for action was formulated. With the exception of Hope Norton, no one had more definite ideas of what should be done, or how to put them in effect, than Mrs. Graham.

“Don’t you think,” she asked, “that we should get up a mammoth petition to present to the Legislature? I would be quite willing to take it around for signatures. Petitions look formidable — even though they are seldom read.”

“That’s a good suggestion,” said Hope, “and even if they are not read, several yards

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of signatures — of the right kind — may impress the members. But Quex needn't stand alone in this. We must get the whole club movement into it."

"How?" asked Nancy Phayre; "suggest, please."

"It would take altogether too much time to go from club to club," objected another member of the committee. "It seems to me that our own club is all we could expect to influence."

"Possibly more," added another, dryly. "And other clubs might not like to follow in our wake. I don't see how we can go around stirring up others — and there are so many others. Oh, it would be quite impossible."

"Not at all," answered Hope, brightly. "Of course, we wouldn't go from club to club — that would be absurd! But now we have an illustration of the good of federation."

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“How?” asked the woman who had strongly opposed Quex’s joining the State Federation the year before.

“All we’ve got to do is to interest the State Federation Board,” declared Hope. “We press the Federation button and their officers do the rest. In other words, get them interested — and that’s easy, because they’re always on the lookout for new opportunities for service. And they will send out circulars and stir up the other clubs,” and she paused breathlessly.

“And your club column — you’d keep it well before the public?” said Nancy.

“You may depend on me,” was the reply. “And now let’s have a letter drafted to the Federation.”

“Fortunately Quex is represented on the State Board,” said Nancy. “Mrs. Blake, are you not a director?”

“I am, and I shall be glad to bring the

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matter up at the meeting to-morrow," and then they settled down to effectual work.

"Those persons who insinuate that a woman's committee sits five hours at a session, and then breaks up with nothing accomplished," said Miss Norton afterward, "should have been with us this afternoon. We've drafted a strong letter to the Federation Board; we've started a mammoth petition, and we've got our plans laid for straight, honest work enough to last all winter. I don't believe a body of men could have done more in two hours than we have."

"Now, my dear," objected Mrs. Blake, "don't fall into that too common habit among club-women of comparing ourselves with men. Neither our clubs nor our club methods have any resemblance to theirs; and let us not talk as if they were either our antagonists or a separate order of beings."

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“ ‘ Male and female created He them,’ ”
quoted Mrs. Graham. “ And we aren’t
alike, and never shall be. Isn’t it so, Mrs.
Norton? ”

“ *Miss Norton,* ” corrected that individual.
“ Hope Norton, spinster, by grace of God
and cruelty of man. ” And with a general
laugh they said good-by and drifted to their
separate homes, leaving Nancy Phayre alone
again in her great, silent house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE State Federation Board was composed of twenty-one of the foremost women in the Commonwealth — women of experience, good judgment, and wide influence. And when they took up the matter of investigating the child-labor problem in their own State, as they did promptly and unanimously at the invitation of Quex, interest in that subject spread rapidly into every town and city. As the breeze that gently stirs the rose-petals on a June evening rises and swells until it tosses the giant branches of the oak and clarifies the whole atmosphere, so this movement to help the weak and defenceless children of the State spread from community to community, until the legislative

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hearing, instead of being a perfunctory affair held in a corner, was attended by as many important and influential people of both sexes as could be crowded into the largest committee-room obtainable. Prominent among these were the State Federation officers, Nancy Phayre, Mrs. Lexington Blake, Cordelia Graham, and a score of women from other well-known clubs.

To Nancy Phayre, brought up in the restricted walks of what is known as "society," this was a new experience, and she felt herself for the first time an active, individual force in the component whole of the workaday world. Without recognizing it, she felt her soul expanding and growing within her, and as the hearing went on and she listened to the revelations that were made concerning the actual conditions of things in certain mills and factories, she grew hot with in-

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dignation that in her day and generation educated communities permitted helpless little children to be imposed upon to such an extent. Twice she kept her seat with difficulty, so strong was the impulse within her to rise and plead for the bill; but a close second thought prevented and reminded her that she actually knew little of the real conditions of the problem. Not so, however, with Cordelia Graham, who attracted the closest attention when she rose — a striking figure in black velvet and chinchilla, with a big picture hat to crown her brilliant coloring.

“I must speak, gentlemen,” she began in her high-pitched, musical voice. “I must plead for the helpless little workers of the State. Go out into the slums, as I have, gentlemen, and see their miserable homes; see them come wearily in from their work at night, all the spontaneous gaiety and playful-

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ness of childhood crushed out of them, and throw themselves on the kitchen floors, utterly exhausted, waiting only for a scanty supper and the chance to crawl into their hard beds. Go through the school districts, as I have, and count up the little ones, under ten, who are not even enrolled in the schools, because they are earning a pittance and therefore must be put to work while they are still babies; go to the mill yards at noon and count up the little burden-bearers as they file wearily out for dinner — and then see whether the State can longer afford to allow this blot upon its escutcheon. Look at this band of women,— noble, representative women,— gentlemen, and remember that there are thousands of us watching to see what this Legislature will do with this bill. Do not say to us, ‘ Oh, you have no right to come here; you, too, are property-owners; you are wearing costly raiment to-day because of cheap

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child-labor in your own factories.' We will answer No! We demand reform — even those of us who are guilty!" and here she threw a dramatic glance to where Nancy Phayre was sitting. "We demand a new law. We seek the protection of these little ones — even from ourselves. Gentlemen, I present you with documentary proof of it," and here she produced, with dramatic effect, the mammoth petition, containing thousands of names, and handed it to the chairman.

"Fine speaker," whispered Nancy to Mrs. Blake. "But to whom is she —"

"Sh-sh! Here is Parker Clayton," and Hope Norton pulled her sleeve. "He's going to speak; listen."

A tall, athletic man, with a wonderful head and face, whose commanding presence instantly hushed every tongue in the room, had risen. And then followed such an appeal for the child of the tenement and the slums

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as no one present had ever heard. His voice was low and magnetic, rising at his climaxes of emotion and falling again in rich cadences, like some instrument under a master hand. Half his audience were in tears when he had finished, and even the opponents of the bill were visibly affected.

And yet every one knew that he had spoken from intimate knowledge and that he did not overdraw his picture. For the story of Parker Clayton's noble sacrifice of a brilliant career in one of the most noted pulpits in the country, that he might go into the lowest and most degraded part of the State capital and lead the life of a settlement worker, was known to everybody. Five years of constant work among the very class of people affected by the bill had made him an authority on the subject, and it was an open secret that he had instigated the bill which was now under consideration. In short,

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he was one of those rare souls who, handicap them as you may, relegate them to the slums if you will, are, by right of their own masterful personalities, leaders of men; and in this case he was an educated, thoughtful, self-controlled and consecrated leader of men. It was a pity that no one took down his words that day — words that poured forth a stream of eloquent facts and figures and clear, sound logic. But perhaps it is enough to record that when the hearing for the remonstrants came, there were but few present, and that there was not a woman among them, and that the committee reported favorably on the bill.

There was no one who cared to speak when Parker Clayton had finished, and the hearing adjourned in a sort of solemn hush, as if the audience had been witnesses of another slaughter of the innocents. Conversation, even, was in hushed tones, as long as they

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remained in the committee-room, and unconsciously every woman drew a long, involuntary breath, once outside in the corridor. And to Nancy Phayre it was all a sort of sacrament at which the purposes and meaning of all her future life underwent a change. Solemnly she turned toward the door, not caring to speak with a single soul, but Hope Norton stopped her:

“I want to present my friend, Mr. Clayton,” she said. “He must know the new president of Quex. We make the modest claim of starting the club-women in rallying around your bill, you know,” she flashed at him.

Mr. Clayton looked straight into Nancy’s eyes and then put out his hand — a thing he seldom did.

“I am honored in meeting you, madam,” he said. “You could not take up a nobler work.”

“Indeed not,” put in a mellifluous voice from behind, and Mrs. Graham pressed into the conversation. “We are especially delighted that Mrs. Phayre has been drawn into service,” she went on in softer tones than before. “*She* is one of the owners of the Sphinx Mill.”

Parker Clayton’s face underwent a curious change as if from conflicting emotions.

“Indeed!” he said, vaguely.

“Yes. George Phayre, the late superintendent, was her husband,” Mrs. Graham went on, as if in explanation of an important fact. But Nancy immediately became aware of a stiffening of the voice.

“Mrs. Phayre, however,” put in Hope Norton, bravely, “is thoroughly in earnest in this work, and, Parker, you may depend on her as one of your strongest supporters in every way.”

“Most certainly,” answered Nancy, in



"She is one of the owners of the Sphinx Mill." — Page 62.

a bewildered tone, for here was an apparent cross-play she did not understand. "Please let me know how and when I can help you, Mr. Clayton."

But before he could reply, Mrs. Phayre's attention was drawn by another voice speaking to her close by.

"Good morning, Mrs. Phayre; good morning," and Senator Vanderwater was holding out a friendly hand. "This *is* an unexpected pleasure, I am sure — but none the less delightful. Welcome to the State-house, Mrs. Blake. It is not often we have the opportunity — aside from inaugural days — of welcoming such guests," and he turned to walk down the corridor with them.

"We are attending the hearing in behalf of the child-labor bill," answered Mrs. Blake, a wicked light in her eye. "Mrs. Phayre is now the president of Quex, you know; and as such is assuming all its duties."

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“ Nobly, I am sure,” answered the Senator, suavely and graciously. “ I haven’t seen you in a long, long time, Mrs. Phayre. And you’re looking remarkably well.”

“ Thank you,” murmured Nancy, as Mrs. Blake stopped for a last word with Mr. Clayton. “ I am finding great help in my new duties. It is well to have one’s mind filled with work — don’t you think, Senator Vanderwater? ”

“ Um — yes; in most cases,” was his reply. “ And since you are in so much better health than formerly, I’m going to ask permission to call soon. I wish to talk with you about some matters George and I were interested in together. May I not? ”

“ I haven’t been receiving many callers,” Nancy hesitated, “ but still — you are an old friend of George’s — and of father’s. Yes, you may call.”

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“ Say, to-morrow evening? ” urged the Senator, hastily, as Mrs. Blake turned toward them again.

“ As you please.”

CHAPTER VII.

“WHAT did she mean? What did I see in his face — that almost imperceptible change?” Nancy asked herself as she sat by her bedroom fire late that night, reviewing the events of the day. “Why is it worth noting that a part-owner of the Sphinx enlists on the side of humanity and charity? I have put off visiting the mills too long. Nothing shall prevent my doing so to-morrow forenoon, alone and unexpected. And Mr. Dexter shall take me through every department. If there is anything wrong —” But she did not finish her sentence. Instead, she gazed sadly into the dying embers, and then rose and made her last preparations for bed.

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In the morning, however, she appeared at the breakfast-table in plain, close-fitting black, all ready to go out.

“You may order the carriage for ten, Marie. I shall lunch at home at one-thirty.”

At twenty minutes past ten she was driving up to the grounds that enclosed the Sphinx Mills. Whether it was because she had never noticed them so particularly before, or because the dampness of a late winter thaw made them more unattractive than usual, Nancy Phayre experienced a sickening sense of chill and disappointment, even before she alighted from her carriage. When she entered the office door the place seemed barn-like and unkempt. She sat down on the nearest chair and sent in her card by a pale little lad of a dozen summers, gazing about her curiously until his return with the new superintendent.

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“ Good morning, Mr. Dexter,” she began, graciously. “ I’ve been wanting for some time to visit the mills. This morning, I’ve got my courage up to come.”

“ I hope we’re not so formidable,” began Mr. Dexter. “ Anything I can do, I shall be more than happy in doing for you.”

“ Even to going all through the mills with me? ” she retorted. “ You see I’m putting you to the test at once. And that’s what I want to do; and now.”

“ Certainly,” was the answer, but Nancy detected a curious hesitation in his voice, which he was evidently trying to make as cordial as possible. “ Of course; shall we begin here? ”

Nancy rose. “ No; let us begin at the very lowest part of the works, and you shall show me all about how the cloth is made,” and so they went together into the largest of the buildings. For an hour Mr. Dexter was at

great pains to explain the processes of carding and spinning and dyeing and weaving, of designing and packing and marketing the products, to all of which she was a most interested listener, seeming not to notice the workers any more than if they had been so many parts of machinery. Finally they were back in the office again. She had seen enough.

“How many children are employed in the mill?” she asked — abruptly it seemed to Mr. Dexter, who had not noticed that she had seen any.

“I can’t say, offhand,” he replied. “Twenty, perhaps — or thirty,” he added, compelled by her straight, level gaze.

“More than that,” she answered. “I saw more than that in the spinning-room alone; will you please have this point looked up for me — now?”

“Why, certainly — if you wish it,” assented

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the superintendent, and he gave an order to one of his subordinates.

They talked about other things, while she waited — of the opera, the newest play, the European situation. But Nancy evinced no further interest in the labor problem at the Sphinx Mills than was involved in her waiting for statistics. After a time a paper was handed to Mr. Dexter.

“Here it is,” he said. “Spinning-room, 32; weaving department, 13; dye-works, 10; packing-room, 21; bobbin-boys, 63; office, 3; miscellaneous, 17. Total, 160.”

“All under twelve?” asked Nancy Phayre, as she folded the paper into her muff.

“Why — yes — I presume so,” Mr. Dexter replied. “We are not supposed to know their ages, you know. They must be, however. I’ll find out for you if you desire — though parents are very unwilling and would be likely to falsify.”

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The clatter of a gong broke in upon him here, and they were obliged to be quiet. The thought came suddenly to Nancy that this was the noon-hour, and she stepped to the doorway.

“You’d better not go out just now,” said Mr. Dexter, at her side. “The yard will be clear in five minutes.”

She turned to him swiftly.

“One more question, Mr. Dexter. Did *you* hire all these children —” and she waved her hand toward the file of dejected, under-sized, toil-worn children streaming out of the tall factories and into the street — “or were they —”

“All here when I came,” he answered. “This is only my second month, you know,” and he stopped awkwardly, remembering that he was talking with the widow of his predecessor.

She drove home in a kind of daze, staring

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at the curtain in front of her so silently that she failed to see several of her acquaintances who bowed to her. She ate her luncheon in the same distraught fashion, and then went to her own room for an hour of quiet. But there was no rest for her. Instead, she paced the floor excitedly, clasping and unclasping her hands in a way she had when unduly excited.

“ I see it all now — all the insinuations — all the covert meanings — the scheming to drag me to that hearing. And all the while that I was pitying those other little children in the abstract — pitying them so that I nearly made a spectacle of myself by getting up and pleading for them — *à la* Graham — all this while *she* knew, and others knew — and Parker Clayton knew — that our mills are just as bad as any in the State. *I* am one of those women who live on the toil of little children. I, who pose as a helper, am

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an employer of child-labor — and George Phayre — ” She paused indignantly and put her hands to her face.

A few minutes later she washed away all traces of tears, ordered the horses and took a long drive, coming back in the glow of a sunset that was glorious out among the country hills, and that showed a splendid flush above the city’s towers and steeples, marking the sky-line with unusual distinctness.

She had failed to remember that Senator Vanderwater was to call that evening, until just as she drove up to the lonely house, which she half-dreaded to enter. And so big and empty did it seem nowadays that the thought of company was most welcome, even though she had not felt particularly drawn toward her husband’s distinguished friend before.

“ I believe I’ll give up the house and go to the Esplanade to live. ” The thought came

like an inspiration. "Free from the cares of housekeeping and the oppressive silence of this establishment, I could give all my time to the work I want to do."

And the look around Mrs. Phayre's mouth told of new and high resolves. She went in and up-stairs, dressing herself for dinner with unusual care, perhaps, since she was to entertain a guest; but still busy with her plans for breaking up the establishment and devoting her whole time to the newly thought-out work.

"I don't believe I was cut out for the purely domestic side of life, after all," she told herself, as she looked in the mirror to put in the last hairpin. "And I believe I rather like the idea of branching out into something else. Domesticity, when indulged in to a marked extent, causes divergence from social and mental development. In every walk of life the preservation of one's individuality is

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absolutely essential if we have any ambition whatsoever for ourselves.

“Frequently those who love us best do most to check the growth of our personality. Many mothers unconsciously and selfishly destroy the individuality and originality of their daughters. Many a husband helps his wife to total mental inertia, and then, if reverses come, expects her to take the helm and steer the boat while he trims the sails. I begin to think that club life is the open door to all social requirements, the open door to all mental capabilities, the open door of development to women who would never otherwise have been known. While marriage is woman’s aim in life, and the creation of a home her uppermost thought, coupled with this must be development on a broad plane. Club-women cannot fill the rôle of loving wife and tender mother to their families only, but can be the loving, cultivated women and tender mothers to the

whole world — and that I'm going to be," she laughed. And then she went down to her solitary dinner.

She was sitting at her grand piano, letting her fingers stray idly over the keys, when Senator Vanderwater was announced. If she had been a vain, or self-conscious woman, she would have noted the admiration in his eyes as he took her proffered hand in greeting. But she was still in the glow of her anticipatory plans, and her newly developing enthusiasm was crowding out all thoughts of self. She had on a soft, clinging robe of some white stuff that showed her fine figure to the best advantage, while her mood was reflected in the brilliancy of her eyes and the soft coloring of her cheeks. It had always been said of her that, while she was absolutely plain at some times, she was strikingly handsome at others; for Nancy Phayre was of the chameleon order of womanhood, which takes



If she had been a vain woman she would have noted the admiration
in his eyes. — *Page 76.*

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on the color of every passing mood. Her day's experiences and the train of thought and emotion which had led up to the present moment were reflected in her to-night, and more than once the Senator checked himself at the beginning of a complimentary speech. But there was that about her that prevented too free use of adjective or compliment, and he refrained from saying all he might have said to other women.

“Tell me,” he said after a little; “how does it happen that you have gone into women's clubs? You are the last woman — pardon me for saying it — for whom I should expect clubs to have any attraction.”

“And why?” asked Nancy.

“Well — er — clubs, don't you know, and that sort of thing — well, aren't they rather the thing for strong-minded women?” he asked, somewhat lamely for so able a man.

“I don't know what you mean,” retorted

Nancy, with some spirit. "I believe the woman's club is the best thing ever given to modern women. I never have known a woman to belong to a club without being improved by it."

"Some women we do not wish to have 'improved,'" answered the Senator, significantly. "Don't spoil yourself, my dear Mrs. Phayre, by trying to improve upon Nature. What about this child-labor bill? What have you club-women to do with it?"

"A great deal, I trust," Nancy replied, her eyes growing dark and earnest. "I, for one, shall never rest until something is done for the protection of those poor little children in the mills. Oh, Senator Vanderwater —"

"Yes; what is it?" he said, gently, as she seemed to hesitate.

"You are experienced; you have all the wisdom that comes of knowledge; you understand social and political economy, and all

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that — tell me — how does it happen that we have such things? ”

“ As what? ” he urged again, gently, as before.

“ As little children toiling in our factories like old men,” she went on seriously. “ Listen; to-day I went down into our own factories — the Sphinx — where my grandfather and my father used to be heavy owners — where I own property — where you do — where George Phayre was so long the superintendent — and I had such faith in his goodness,” she went on, more to herself than to the man who sat watching the color come and go on her rounded cheek. “ Why does not the law protect them better? Why have we been so lax about enforcing what law we had? ”

“ To explain all the reasons,” he began, when she recovered herself and turned to him for an answer, “ I should have to go into depths of political economy that would tire a

lady. But there is something to be said on both sides. To one of your emotional nature and kind heart, the situation seems terrible, no doubt. But think a moment — your grandfather was a wonderful thinker — your father had one of the finest legal minds and one of the best hearts in the world — can you think them wanting in the sense of right and wrong? George Phayre, too, my dear girl — surely, it is not necessary for me to urge you not to let your heart — your sympathetic heart — run away with your head. I wish I might say another word.”

“ Oh, *do* you think me disloyal to George — to my father? ” she cried in distress.

“ No, no! You misunderstand me,” he soothed her. “ I did not say that; I would not imply it. But I will say I am opposed to women’s clubs on principle. Give them up, Mrs. Phayre, and stay quietly at home.” And he looked around the great, elegantly

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furnished drawing-room as if that in itself were an argument on his side.

“ Yes; stay at home and go mad with loneliness and grief,” cried Nancy. “ Why, this club means freedom and life and hope for me. I do not want to stay here and mope. I do not want to be a ‘ domestic woman ’ any longer. We women have changed our clothes, our houses, our food, and now we are changing our domesticity. I owe a great deal already to what the club is doing for me and the club friendships of club-women.”

“ Then let me urge you to drop this strenuous sort of club work, and take up the social club,” persisted the Senator, “ although I am aware that Mrs. Phayre is already a social leader. But the more exclusive social club would be better suited to your taste, I should think. Or the whist clubs,” and he looked anxiously at her, as one whom he would persuade against her will.

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“ I’d rather be president of Quex — a club that is already a real force in the community,” she answered, “ than be at the head of all the other clubs in town, be they social clubs, musical clubs, debating clubs, dramatic clubs, athletic clubs, art clubs, civic clubs, literary clubs — any organization of women, be it church or social. I even include card clubs. Amiability and whist should go hand in hand, and to play bridge successfully one must have an air of superior breeding and a fat pocket-book. But to be president of Quex one needs only courage and time to carry out the work we have planned,” she added.

“ Pardon me if I have the boldness to say I am sorry,” the Senator answered. “ I admire your courage, but — may I emulate your frankness? ”

“ Certainly,” said Nancy, smilingly. “ I invite it.”

“ Then don’t mix up in this child-labor bill.”

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Mrs. Phayre did not reply, nor did she look up from her lap.

“It will get you into all manner of troubles,” he went on after a little. “As the largest stockholder of the Sphinx, you really must be careful. The world will not appreciate your motives. The other stockholders may not. And in any case I should deprecate for you any such notoriety as is sure to come to you — if you go on with this business. But pardon my plain speaking. Have I gone too far?”

“But what would you advise?” asked she, in a guarded tone. A more sensitive man would have hesitated, but he went on:

“That you join the exclusive social club only, if you must join clubs. Better that you close your house and take a year or two in Europe — and, by the way, I’m going over myself next year. After that — well, you are a young woman, Mrs. Phayre.”

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He paused, significantly, but she would not look up. How could he know her eyes were flashing dangerously?

“You should not waste your whole life,” he breathed, softly. “You are restless and unhappy now, and so are giving yourself to this public work. Throw it over, and after a decent season,” he reached out to take one of her soft white hands that lay on the edge of her chair, “marry me. I could make you a happy woman, Mrs. Phayre.”

“But what if I still preferred to be president of Quex?” And drawing away her hand, she rose to her height. “Shall I give you some music?” and she walked to the piano, and began to play stormy and passionate music that voiced the shame and pain and stress of her own soul.

“Oh, why is it that such men as he can never believe in the truth and honesty and earnest aspirations of us women?” she de-

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manded of her soul when he had gone, a few moments later, and she went into her library again. "Talk to them of any real, earnest work you want to do, let them see that you have a soul that looks out toward world-service, open your heart to them as if they were sensible beings, and ask their help — and they offer us marriage? As if that were the alpha and omega of our being! I am furious," and she paced back and forth again, as if she would never get calm. "No, no; I would rather be president of Quex — and my own mistress," she muttered, as she climbed the broad stairs to bed. "And yet —"

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT not to sleep. Instead, she tossed wearily on her pillow, reviewing the incidents of the day and asking herself whether she was right in taking up the cause of these children? Whether they were not, after all, as comfortable as their class could or would be? Whether she ought to do anything which would seem to reflect on what had been allowed hitherto, by the masculine portion of her family? Whether George Phayre really did wrong in employing all these little ones? And then again, she would seem to see the wan, pinched faces and stunted, half-nourished figures of the children as they filed out of the Sphinx that day — children who ought to be in school for some years to come; children who were

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being cheated out of their birthright by rich and powerful corporations, victims, in a way, of a system created for and primarily sustained by just such women as she. "For," she told herself in her extremity, "we are the ones at fault, even if we do not know it. And we can help it, if we will."

Morning brought no answer to her conscientious strivings, and she dressed herself to go out, and walked briskly over to Mrs. Blake's. She found her "second mother" alone and put some of her questionings before her.

"You are a stockholder, too," she said in explanation. "What do you make of the situation?"

"I don't know why we haven't awakened before," answered Mrs. Blake, in the slow speech which she used when seriously thinking. "The thing has been going on for years, I suppose — only getting worse of

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late. I remember the time, of course, when the mill operatives were young American women of good education — daughters of up-country farmers. Why, there are prominent club-women to-day in the older set who worked in the mills when they were young — and no disgrace to them, either, since conditions were so different. But they were superseded by foreigners, and these put their children at work as early as they could. You will find that the children employed in the mills are invariably those of foreign parentage — ”

“ Oh, no; I beg your pardon,” Nancy interrupted. “ In the Southern States there are hundreds of white native children working as well as black ones.”

“ You are right,” answered Mrs. Blake. “ I was thinking only of conditions here. But wherever it happens you will find the mill children coming from illiterate homes.”

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“ All the more reason why they should be educated, then,” said Nancy. “ Think how the race must degenerate when these over-worked, tired, old-young children grow up and marry and produce another generation. It seems to me the salvation of our country, and especially the solution of the labor problem, lies in better education for the masses.”

“ True; but that is what your friend Senator Vanderwater does not believe,” Mrs. Blake replied, “ although he may not have told you that. I have heard him say he believes education, promiscuously distributed among the masses, accomplishes little more than to scatter the seeds of discontent and raise up demagogues. He thinks workmen and operatives should ‘ stay in their class ’— as he puts it.”

Nancy looked serious and did not answer for a moment. Then with one of the sudden changes of mood peculiar to her, she asked :

“ Tell me, dear ; did George Phayre believe that ? ”

“ Why, how should I know what George Phayre believed ? ” retorted Mrs. Blake, skilfully parrying the question. “ You should know about that yourself.”

“ Now, I come to think of it,” said Nancy, slowly, “ we never talked about such things. I haven’t the remotest idea what he thought or how he stood on the labor question.”

Mrs. Blake smiled, enigmatically. “ And now, Nancy,” she answered, “ shall we go down to Horner & Blow’s and match this silk ? I’ve ordered the carriage for eleven.”

“ Do you know, I’ve about made up my mind to shut up my house and go to a hotel — the Esplanade — for a year,” Nancy announced on the way down-town.

“ I suppose the care of the house takes a

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good deal of time — ” began Mrs. Blake, doubtfully.

“ It is not that,” said Nancy. “ Not that at all. I wish there was a good deal more of care — ” and she stopped abruptly.

“ I know,” and Mrs. Blake laid a caressing hand on Nancy’s. “ I know what you mean.”

“ Yes, I am just dead lonesome,” Nancy cried out. “ I simply cannot live there alone any longer. I’m going to let the DeGrasses have it, furnished. Then I’m going to throw all my interests into outside affairs — Quex — and all that.”

“ Perhaps that will be best,” said Mrs. Blake. “ Although one can never really run away from oneself, you know.”

“ No. But neither need one sit alone and commune with one’s own grief all the time,” said Nancy. And then they alighted at Horner & Blow’s and were soon lost in the

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intricacies of silk and ribbon counters. On the way out, they met Hope Norton, who stopped only just long enough to say,—

“ Oh, Mrs. Phayre, I’m going to bring Parker Clayton around this afternoon for your cup of five-o’clock tea. May I? ”

“ Since you say you are going to do it — you may,” laughed Nancy.

Mrs. Phayre’s “ five-o’clocks ” were becoming extremely popular, although she had established them only since she had become president of Quex. But she had found it necessary to see so many club members and talk matters over informally with them that some regular hour seemed almost imperative, and once it became known that Mrs. Phayre’s drawing-room was open — with wafers and tea — on certain afternoons at five, not only the members of Quex, but many others, men as well as women, managed to drop in at that hour.

On this particular day, Mrs. Graham came for the first time. She was worldly-wise enough to see that hostilities should at least be veiled and that she had nothing to gain by holding aloof from a president who bade fair to be so popular as Nancy. And the president of Quex was learning, as so many other club presidents have learned — that to succeed, one must, indeed, love one's enemies.

“You and I must be friends,” declared Cordelia Graham, as she walked into the drawing-room the first time. “Because we could not both be president, need we be enemies?”

“I am sure I have always been friendly,” answered Nancy, holding out her hand. “And I must thank you for the way you've taken hold of committee work.”

“Oh, work?” answered her guest. “That always comes easy to me. Inertia would be more of an effort.”

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“All the same you have done splendid work,” granted Nancy. “Do you know, this club work is a revelation to me? Some people say that while the club is the best means to a social problem I believe the club has a right to exist only as it has a definite purpose that cannot be reached by individual effort.”

“And there is no especial need for a club to exist only to give some women a chance to read encyclopedic extracts to others,” Mrs. Graham answered brightly, “or to run for office. And if one is defeated in office, there is surely no need for seceding members to flock all alone by themselves, and form a new club to travel the same vague path under a new set of officers. Some of them asked me to head such a faction, you must know, Mrs. Phayre, but I just could not see the sense of it.”

Nancy happened to know that this had been Mrs. Graham's own proposition to

her supporters, but she only smiled and said:

“ On the other hand, we have no right to join or to stay in a club unless we are in sympathy with its purposes. Club-women are as much bound to live up to their constitution as church-members are to live up to their creed. If I join, for a selfish reason, say, to improve my social position, or to get on the board of directors, I am exercising a certain spiritual dishonesty that works against myself.”

Mrs. Graham looked at her narrowly, a moment.

“ I reckon we’re quits,” she said, in her peculiar drawl. “ Mrs. Phayre, I admire the way you” — but half a dozen others coming in at that instant, the sentence was not completed.

Hope Norton and Parker Clayton did not appear until nearly six — so late that

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Mrs. Phayre urged them to stay to dinner, together with the mill superintendent, Mr. Dexter, which they finally did — and when they were alone, the talk naturally swerved around to the legislative hearing.

“I’m going to make a confession to you three,” said Nancy, over the dessert. “And that is, that, although I’m publicly committed to the support of this bill, and although my sympathies are with it — entirely so — I am not quite sure that it is a wise move.” She looked at Clayton as if she expected him to come at once to the defence of his pet theories, but he ate his meringue in silence.

“Why, Mrs. Phayre, why not?” asked Hope. “I don’t see how we can draw back now, if we wanted to. And if you’d ever seen those children, you wouldn’t have another mind.”

“I have seen them,” said Nancy. “I went through the Sphinx this morning —

thanks to Mr. Dexter here. And to my surprise, my horror — I found there nearly two hundred little children that should be in school or in their homes, at work. My whole heart went out to them. I came home and made up my mind that I would do everything in my power to shut the Sphinx doors to them.”

“ You will find me willing to do everything I can to help you,” promised Dexter. “ I haven’t seen my way clear just yet, but I’ve been planning that very thing.”

Clayton looked up. “ Do you mean it? ” he asked.

“ My hand upon it,” was Dexter’s reply. “ I will discharge every one of them, if Mrs. Phayre will stand by me; and yet, you hesitate? ” he turned to Nancy.

“ Not if you will stand by me,” she said, smiling. “ The only question with me is — if the present conditions are all wrong,

how happens it they exist? The Sphinx directors are some of our ablest and best men. *They* do not oppose child-labor."

"You've been talking with Senator Vanderwater," exclaimed Hope in her direct fashion. "That's how you come to be shaky in your ethics. Poor Mrs. Phayre! That man's sophistry would convince a much wiser head than yours."

"One of the greatest obstacles we have to meet," said Clayton, "and one of the least to be expected in a twentieth-century American community, is the opposition of many employers to anything beyond the scantiest rudimentary education for the children in their mills, and, unfortunately, Mrs. Phayre, your friend, the Senator, is notoriously committed to that side."

"Oh," and Nancy breathed a long sigh, as though a hard problem had been cleared for her. "Then you don't think one ought to be

influenced by any stand that may have been taken by — well, by members of one's family, for instance — ”

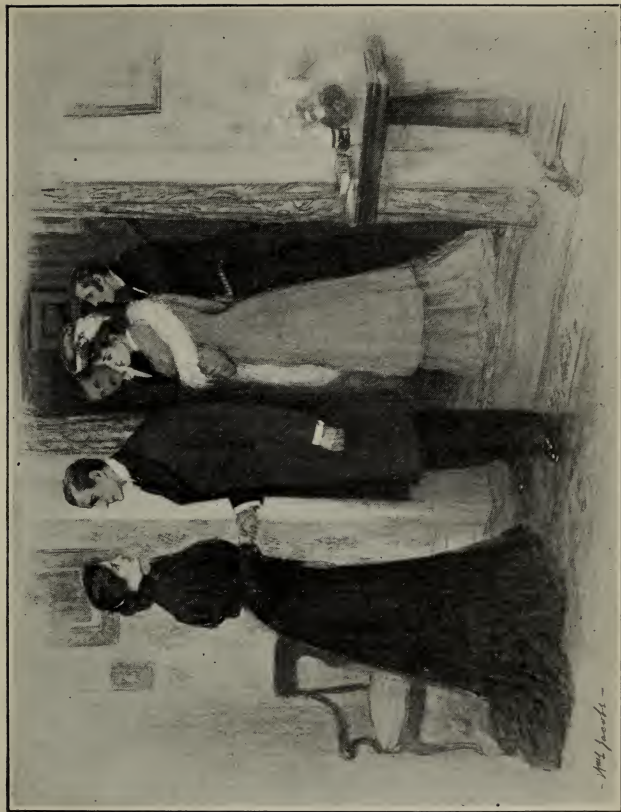
“ You may be pretty sure, my dear lady,” was the reply, “ that the people who are for standing by the doctrine of *laissez faire* are never the ones who suffer for righteousness' sake. We can never work for reforms without going counter to the opinions of our relatives. As to this bill, why, abolishing child-labor is going to be no child's play. Any organization proposing to attack the evil must be ready for hard, practical, and, above all, persistent work ; it must not expect to get results merely by taking a stand as an imposing moral influence on the right side. Our committee, for one thing, is after more and stricter legislation, and is pretty certain, therefore, to have a good many rough encounters with practical politics. It will often have more need of political sagacity than of parlor talks.

Happily, the committee is not constructed on the parlor-talk plan."

They adjourned to the library for coffee at this point, and the talk became more general, but an hour later, as they were saying good night, Mr. Clayton held her hand for a second longer than was necessary, and said :

"Don't let them blind you, Mrs. Phayre. It's up to you, as my boys say, to do some pretty effectual work for humanity — if you will."

"And I will," she answered, looking straight into his eyes.



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“Don't let them blind you, Mrs. Phayre.” — Page 100.

CHAPTER IX.

It was State Federation Day in a neighboring city, and Quex was sending a large delegation. When Nancy boarded the train at the Central Station it seemed to be filled with club-women, talking, laughing, exchanging greetings and good-bys, and standing in the aisles. At first she doubted whether she could get through the first car, to say nothing of finding a seat.

“ Shall we go on into the parlor-car ? ” she asked of Mrs. Blake, who was with her.

“ No, indeed,” responded that lady. “ One loses half the fun and half the inspiration of a Federation meeting by segregating oneself in a parlor-car. We shall find a seat somewhere.” And at that moment Félicie Dean was noticed frantically waving a newspaper at

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them from the other end of a car, where she was saving a whole seat for the president of Quex.

“ I thought you'd never come,” she said, as the two women reached her, breathless. “ The Graham lady was determined to wrest it from my feeble hold, but I've saved it. Goodness, if there is anybody left who doesn't believe in the strength of the ‘ woman movement ’ let him try to get a seat in a Federation train.”

Club friends from everywhere pressed in and around them, stopping for a bit of talk and a hand-clasp. The talk was half-serious and altogether friendly; but not a word of ordinary gossip was heard. Everybody seemed preoccupied with the questions which were to be discussed during the day's convention.

When they reached their destination, groups of smiling, well-dressed women, wearing unobtrusive ribbon badges, came forward

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smilingly to greet and show them the way to the church where the sessions were to be held, where they found the delegates' seats roped off with white ribbons, as if for a bridal party — an illusion carried out by the banks of flowers and potted plants around the quaint, old-fashioned pulpit. Although Nancy Phayre had belonged to clubs for years, this was her first Federation meeting, and she found the atmosphere of intelligent and well-bred hospitality delightful.

The State president, a fine-looking woman of middle age, called the meeting to order from the pulpit half-hidden by banks of greenery. The strains of melody which had been pouring from the organ-loft died softly away with the hum of feminine voices as the delegates settled back in their seats prepared to give their serious attention to the programme, on which appeared (according to the printed slips which were found in every

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seat) several distinguished names. And the morning session was opened with gentle-voiced prayer by a woman minister, whose name was known throughout the country. The local president, young and beautifully attired, came forward and gave a cordial welcome to all present; the State president replied in the bright and tactful fashion which made friends for her wherever she went, and then they settled down to the more serious business of the day. A noted educator was introduced who told how the actual child-labor in the State depleted the schools, showing by statistics that in one city of 18,000 population and 2,000 school-children, only 100 boys were in the high school, and in another, with 2,700 children of school age, an actual enrolment of 2,100, with only 147 in the high schools. He was followed by another, a sociological worker, who had interested himself in the question whether much of the

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work done in factories by small children could not just as well be performed by adults. He found one large and prosperous plant in which this practice had been adopted and with entire success. And one of the strongest opponents of age limit laws had admitted that if adult help were made necessary for all manufacturers it would be no competitive disadvantage to any of them. In some plants, moreover, he found automatic machinery being introduced which dispenses with much of the work usually done by boys. Such a working out of the matter would mean, he said, a shifting of some of the burdens of toil from those least able to carry it to the inanimate machine, which is good for nothing else, has no morals to undermine, no physical health to shatter, needs no education, casts no ballot, and is neither to be fitted nor unfitted, by anything that happens to it, for the duties of citizenship. "But," said he, "in

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the case of boys as at present employed in certain factories, every one of these dangers is right at hand. The testimony of one mill manager as to the physical strain on the boys has already been quoted. In one of the cities investigated, nearly all the boys in the mills are profane and are inveterate tobacco-chewers. In many instances stalwart men were heard directing their boy helpers in language so profane as to be not only shocking to an adult, but blighting to the moral sensibilities of a boy from ten to fourteen years of age."

When this speaker had finished, a discussion from the floor was invited, and several women asked intelligent and sensible questions of the two speakers. At last, the the president said:

"It is only fair to say that interest in this matter of better child-labor laws was aroused among club-women here, by one of the oldest

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organizations among us. May we not hear a word from the president of Quex — Mrs. Nancy Phayre? ”

There was a general clapping of hands at mention of her name, and as Nancy rose and came forward to the platform in front of the pulpit she was conscious of a wave of friendliness and good feeling that seemed to make it easy for her to address a large audience for almost the first time in her life.

“ Open your mouth and the Lord will fill it,” Félicie had whispered as she left the pew where she had been sitting. “ And don’t be scared.”

Somehow the Lord, who helps women to do their public duty, did help her, and she found herself talking to the State Federation with as much ease as though she were speaking with guests in her own drawing-room.

“ Tell us how you came to take it up,” the

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president said, as she stepped up on the platform.

“ Why, we felt that we must do something really worth while,” said Nancy, simply, “ and we just went ahead and did this. We have spent a good deal of time in looking into this thing, both at home and abroad. We have already made a careful search throughout the State for cases where the earnings of children were actually necessary to the family support, and found the number so insignificant as to furnish no sort of adequate reason for permitting a loophole in the age-limit law, allowing exceptions at the option of local officers, as is done in some States. The cases where the need was real were capable of being provided for to much better advantage in other ways. But, ladies, those of us who have votes as stockholders, or influence with men who vote in any way, have each our special work. If we allow child-labor to go

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on under our very eyes, we are, ourselves, culpable. Personally, we have all, you and I, each — something to do about this matter, and I for one will not again rest easy while little children are being overworked that I may live in comfort.”

She was interrupted at this point by a white-gowned usher who brought her a telegram. Startled for a moment, woman-like, she tore it open, read it, and passed it up to the president.

“ It is a message to the president of Quex,” gasped the president, with a white face, “ telling her that the State Legislature, this morning, gave the petitioners for the child-labor bill leave to withdraw.”

A groan went up from the assembly. But Nancy Phayre’s eyes flashed, while the quick color came and went on her cheek as it did only when she was greatly moved.

“ Madam President,” she called in ringing

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accents, "I move that this convention commit itself to unceasing work in this direction, and that we appoint a committee to-day to present the bill again to the next Legislature."

A dozen women were on their feet to second this motion, and it was carried, not with excitement and emotion, but with a grave sense of the importance of what they were doing.

During the lunch-hour, this was the absorbing topic of conversation, especially at the "president's table," and early in the afternoon, when she announced the names of this new committee, Mrs. Phayre's name was at the head of it.

"Scandalous," whispered Cordelia Graham to her neighbor, "that the committee should be headed by a woman who is almost a direct employer of child-labor herself. How some people do love to pose." But Félicie Dean, who sat behind her and who overheard the remark, was brave enough to lean forward

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and nip that piece of gossip in the bud by saying:

“ You are mistaken. Mrs. Phayre has already set about having all children in the Sphinx Mills discharged, although some of the directors are dreadfully down on her for it. If ever there was a woman with the courage of her convictions, Nancy Phayre is one.”

The chief speaker of the afternoon was Parker Clayton, who commingled his most convincing statistics with persuasive argument in the same captivating fashion as at the legislative hearing. Among other things he said:

“ To know that somebody is on the watch, making a business of demanding enforcement, proves a great stimulus and active reminder to the average public official. Here is one of the most obvious reasons why there ought to be just such child-labor committees as you

have appointed to-day. And the more people it can interest locally, the more voluntary, all-the-time coöperation it can secure in factory centres, in keeping right on the track of violations or evasions of the law, the more thoroughly effective its labors will be; since, of course, the visits of our field secretaries to any one community cannot be numerous or frequent. In one of the largest cities the direct result of our efforts was that orders were issued to the chief of police to report all violations of the child-labor ordinances, and rigidly enforce the laws for protection of children. Let this kind of influence be backed up by local volunteers, working in constant touch with your committee, and the existence of this organization would be justified if no new legislation whatever were secured. The facts show that the grip of the factory on the young lives of the wage-earning population is firm and

many-fingered, even in some of our most important industrial sections; and that, apart from new campaigns, there must be vigorous, persistent effort to make good the progress already won. Remember, too, that much of the really effective work in enforcing such compulsory school laws as exists is due to the efforts of schoolteachers and principals. The disposition of parents to decide in favor of the mill as against the school is peculiar to no section and against this the teacher and the truant officer must keep ever on the alert. In one section an effort is being made to have the matter of determining ages placed in the hands of the school principals or teachers. Again, the method of issuing age certificates should be so regulated as to minimize the temptation of parents to misrepresent the ages of their children. Where it is left merely to the word of the parents, it is evident that child-labor must be a 'splendid

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rejuvenator,' since the certificates usually show a child to be from two to four years older than appearances would indicate. In fact, this matter of getting existing laws enforced bids fair to keep the committee quite as busy as securing new legislation where the age limits are too low or the loopholes too many."

He said much more in that magnetic way of his, and every woman present went home with a definite idea of what particular work she must do, herself, the coming year — work that told powerfully, when the next Legislature met.

As for Nancy Phayre, this day's experience was like a new baptism to her. She rode home silently, gazing abstractedly from the car window, while a score of her immediate neighbors left their seats to huddle around Parker Clayton, as he talked at the other end of the car, discussing with Cordelia Graham and the State president the prospects of

the bill next season; for no one was discouraged in the least by the check the present Legislature had put on their efforts. So absorbed was Nancy Phayre that when a member of one of her Quex committees dropped into the seat beside her and whispered: "Oh, Mrs. Phayre, have you heard the scandal about Mrs. Graham — the actual truth about her past?" she felt a positive shock, as though, somehow, she were being pulled into the mire.

"No — no," she exclaimed. "Don't tell me. I don't want to know. Let us not spoil this beautiful day with petty gossip."

CHAPTER X.

QUEX was about to celebrate its first "Gentlemen's Night." It had for years been content to celebrate its advance in age by a simple "tea" following its annual meeting, when officers were chosen and elaborate reports were read, of its accomplishments and aims. But with its membership in the State Federation and its access of life and ambition, came the impulse to follow in the footsteps of other organizations and hold an elaborate banquet, with flowers and music and pretty gowns — and husbands or their substitutes.

"What shall it be?" they asked one another, and the form of entertainment became the topic of lively discussion at one meeting. There had been talk of inviting various officials

of high degree, and Nancy Phayre was urged to make her personal acquaintance with the governor of the State the means of securing him as the chief speaker.

“ But,” said Nancy, “ he is no speaker at all. We all know he is a fine executive, but he would have nothing to say before a woman’s club meeting. Besides, he is worked to death now, and I happen to know that he is going to Washington that very week.”

“ More than one governor,” added Mrs. Blake, “ has been killed by the inordinate demands of his people for speech-making and dining out. Everybody, from the big political party affairs down to women’s clubs and Sunday-school societies, nowadays, has fallen into the habit of calling on the governor for a speech. And if he happens to be a good-natured man, who has not learned to say ‘ no ’ ” — “ or has another political bee in his bonnet,” put in a sarcastic woman from a

corner — “ he allows himself to be worked to death,” finished Mrs. Blake. “ Let’s not bother Governor Encell with our affairs.”

“ I happen to know,” put in Mrs. Graham’s slow treble, “ that a very distinguished foreigner will be in town at that time. I think I could get him for you.”

Several women seemed greatly interested in this, and one was about to move that Mrs. Graham be empowered to secure such an attraction, but Nancy Phayre only asked:

“ First, may we know who the distinguished foreigner is? ”

“ He is the Count de Beauvais,” said Mrs. Graham. “ I had the honor of his acquaintance in London. He is in this country making a special study of the ‘ modern woman movement.’ ”

“ I have heard of him,” answered the president, dryly. “ Ladies, what do you say to leaving the banquet and the after-dinner

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speeches out of the question, and just holding a pleasant reception, receiving our guests cordially — furnishing some good music and dainty refreshments, and letting the intellectual side lapse for that evening? ”

“ Good ! ” cried Hope Norton. “ If you want the men to come and have so good a time that they will come again next year, that’s the way to do it. ”

“ Men don’t care for intellectual essays and original poems, ” said the sarcastic woman. “ They’d rather dance or play cards. ”

“ That’s a good suggestion, too, ” said another.

“ But the Count ? ” piped up Mrs. Graham’s voice again. “ He’s pretty sure to be here. I hate to have him think us frivolous. ”

“ It won’t hurt him, ” said Félicie, “ to see the frivolous side of us for once. He must be dead tired of so much

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culture as he has run up against in women's clubs over here." Nancy smiled inscrutably. "For my part I'd much prefer — and I speak for all the younger women in the club — to have it a pleasant party; the kind of place where we can all have an opportunity to become acquainted with the husbands of other members. A valuable bit of knowledge it may prove, too, for you never can tell whether a woman is to be congratulated or pitied or blamed till you know her husband."

And so the evening party was decided upon.

"I do not want to enter the contest of rivalry that seems to have taken possession of the clubs of this town," said Nancy to Mrs. Blake, as they were driving home together. "If one club has a successful 'Gentlemen's Night,' with some distinguished speaker, another club sets to work to procure one a little higher up in the social scale. Because one club has

the mayor as chief guest another must have the governor or the President.”

“ And what about this Count of Mrs. Graham’s? ” asked Mrs. Blake. “ I knew by your face there was something — ”

“ Haven’t you heard of the goings on in the Nota Bene out in Chicago? ” was Nancy’s reply.

Mrs. Blake drew a long breath — “ Oh, *that* one? ”

“ That one,” answered Nancy. “ I think Quex will keep out of it.”

But when the gala night came, Mrs. Graham had the foreigner there, introducing him to every one as her “ friend from Paris.” He was a small, keen-looking Frenchman, but to Nancy Phayre he was almost repulsive, and beyond acknowledging the introduction she would have nothing to say to him. It was enough for her that he had compromised the reputation of one club-president. “ And

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anyway," she told herself, "he is not the kind of man that fascinates a woman of the world. If that poor, silly Mrs. Henning had had more experience she would never have encouraged his attentions."

Senator Vanderwater, by contrast, never appeared at such advantage, and when he took Mrs. Phayre, clad in soft, clinging white into the supper-room, more than one person noted the fact and commented upon it. Even the most emancipated and advanced woman present could not fail to see how well suited they were to each other. Poor Nancy! It was well you could not hear the match-makers.

Mrs. Graham, following just behind, with the rather undersized Count, overheard a pregnant remark as they passed a group of gossips. She looked keenly at Nancy and took a more leisurely survey of the handsome Senator.

“Not if I can help it,” she said to herself, half-aloud, through set teeth.

“I beg your pardon,” asked the Count, who had been interrupted in the midst of a remark.

“I was only agreeing with you,” smiled his partner. “You have such a keen insight into these things, Count.”

“You American women are so *sympathique*,” he answered softly. “So intellectual, so up-to-date, as you call it.”

“Oh, yes. Everything about American women is up-to-date,” laughed Mrs. Graham, carelessly—“except their ages.” But she kept her eye on the Senator, and when they reached the supper-room, managed to get the seat next his. Whereupon she exerted her many attractions to such good effect that instead of saying all he had meant to, to the widow of George Phayre, he found use for all his skill in repartee to parry the wit

of the striking Southerner on the other side.

“A charming woman — charming,” he told himself as he lit his cigar in his own library that night. “Wonder where she came from? Still there isn’t one of ’em that can equal Nancy Phayre.”



“ May I have the honor and privilege of calling upon
Madam President ? ” — Page 125.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN the departing guests said good-by to the president of Quex that night, everybody was agreed in the verdict that the first "Gentlemen's Night" had been the greatest possible success.

"I wouldn't have come if it had been a matter of after-dinner oratory," said a well-known judge as he took Nancy's hand. "You are one of the few women who know how to make a man have a good time —"

"She is a young, charming widow," broke in Mrs. Graham, coming out in her turn. "There's nothing like experience to teach a woman tact," — to which the judge did not reply until beyond her hearing and he was alone with his wife.

"May I have the honor and the privilege,"

asked the Count, who was accompanying Mrs. Graham to her carriage, "of calling upon Madam President in her own home?" and he bent rather lower over her hand than the occasion demanded.

"I am sorry," she answered, "but I am about closing my house — and I could not promise a free hour."

"What — going away?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"I am letting my house," replied Nancy, "and yes — I may go away later on."

"Letting that beautiful house?" exclaimed Mrs. Graham. "Why, if that were my home, I'd never close it."

"Possibly," was Nancy's answer. "But I have so much to do — there are so many calls on my time now — that I'm going to give all my strength to it."

"To club-work?" pursued Mrs. Graham.

"Yes — and some other. Really, I can-

not do all I have planned, and keep house.”

“ Oh, well — you know what Ruskin says,” said Mrs. Graham, — “ ‘ If you have too much to do — don’t do it.’ ”

“ I *must* do it,” was the reply. “ Good night.”

By May the DeGrasses had occupied her house, and Mrs. Phayre was established in a pleasant suite at the Esplanade, a big downtown hotel, where she settled for the summer, making a convenient centre for her working committees. It was not long before her rooms were the gathering point of many serious-faced, thoughtful women, for Quex was now thoroughly aroused to the work which lay at its very door. Besides their definitely arranged campaign for the child-labor bill, which involved a regular system of sending out circular letters, and personal interviews with legislators and mill-owners, the members

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were establishing a vacation-school in one of the poorest districts of the town, with a summer playground attached, where the children of tenement houses might have a chance to amuse themselves, away from the street influences.

But Nancy Phayre was not content with instigating and directing all this. Now that her conscience had been touched and her activities fairly aroused, she could not settle back into her former state of inertia. She grieved still, but she had learned that the best panacea in the world for grief is work, and plenty of it. Her arms ached at night, still, for the baby she had lost; her heart turned still toward the mother-heart that had cradled her for all her life — a safe haven of peace against any storm; but although she did not realize it as yet, certain ideals lay shattered on the ground at which she would not look. Instead of mourning for George Phayre as the lost hero

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of her youthful dreams, she crowded her mind with work that kept her from dwelling on the actual business side of him. She was loyal enough to his memory to shut away such thoughts as would reveal the shadows on a character she had believed white as snow. And though she went to the Sphinx Mills frequently, and personally investigated the conditions of life among the operatives, in tenement and boarding-house, she resolutely and illogically refused to make any deductions which would necessarily reflect on the former superintendent, who had been invested with more power, even, than usual of controlling the fate of those under him. One of the first things Nancy decided upon was that the children should be liberated from work; and her next plan was to establish a better system of housing the Sphinx people.

This was one of the oldest factories in the State and had always been a "close corpora-

tion," her grandfather having held the majority of the stock. George Phayre, who had come from Rhode Island to take charge of the mills at an age when most young men of his age would be glad of a subordinate position there, had bought out certain other stockholders, and Nancy was now heir to all these shares. Before becoming the president of Quex, the thought had never occurred to her that her influence in these factories might be proportionate to her stockholdings — or, indeed, that she had any influence at all. But now she was fully awake to her opportunities and her responsibilities. She found a good friend in young Dexter, who seconded warmly all her efforts for betterment. But there was plenty of opposition among the other stockholders, all of whom were of the "eminently respectable" class of society, against whom it might seem presumptuous in a young woman of Nancy

Phayre's training to set up her notions for upsetting and improving the ancient traditions. And these worthy gentlemen suffered a great shock when, at their annual meeting, Nancy Phayre appeared in person — and as a person of very decided and somewhat startling opinions of her own.

It had not been Senator Vanderwater's fault. Indeed, he had called upon her at the Esplanade, the previous evening, and very cautiously introduced the subject of the annual meeting.

“ Yes, I received my notice,” was Nancy's calm reply. “ Ten o'clock in the morning, I believe? ”

The Senator admitted as much. “ And have you — at least I suppose you have — arranged for your proxy? ” he added.

“ My proxy? ” and Nancy looked at him with the straightforward gaze which he considered the least attractive thing about her.

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“ Yes — I do not suppose,” he explained, “ you would care to attend in person — and your interests should be protected, you know.”

“ So I think,” answered Nancy, demurely. “ And I shall be there to protect them.”

“ Ah-h? ” The Senator’s tone indicated indecision. “ Do you think — ? I shall be charmed to see you, my dear Mrs. Phayre ; I am always charmed to see you anywhere and everywhere. But really, would you care to put yourself in that position? ”

“ That position? ” echoed Nancy. “ Why the emphasis? Is there any reason why all stockholders should not be present? Are the meetings so very formidable? ”

“ Oh, not at all, not at all,” was the answer. “ Only — well, to be frank, my dear Mrs. Phayre, no lady has ever attended a meeting of the Sphinx directors.”

“ And is there any reason why ladies may

not attend a meeting?" asked Nancy, with a glint of mischief in her eye. "Is it an orgy such as a self-respecting woman should shun?"

The Senator smiled. "We are gentlemen, I trust," he answered with dignity. "But it is a question of precedent. You will not misunderstand me, I trust, when I say I would willingly serve as your proxy and save you the annoyance of attending this meeting."

"Thank you," she said, cordially. "But to me it is not a question of precedent. Heretofore, I have been represented by some male relative."

"That can be remedied, even now," interrupted the Senator in a low voice, but Nancy paid no heed.

"As the holder of a certain proportion of the Sphinx interests I cannot shirk my duty toward them. I shall attend — and very

likely I shall think it my duty to express an opinion or two as well as cast my vote."

The Senator smiled affably. "And when do you start for Europe?" he asked.

"I have not definitely settled on a date," was the evasive reply. "You are sailing on Saturday?"

"I am. Is it too much to hope that —" But at this moment Mrs. Hopkins, the elderly relative who occupied the suite with Nancy, came in and greeted him with effusion. And a few moments later three other ladies were ushered in, one of whom was Mrs. Graham. Her stay was short, however, for she found it necessary to leave a few minutes later, when the Senator rose to go,— a fact noted by the keen eyes of Mrs. Hopkins.

"Do you intend to go to Europe this summer?" she asked Nancy, abruptly, as they sat *en tête-à-tête* at dinner.

"I hardly think so," was the reply.

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“ But you told Senator Vanderwater — ”
the elder one began.

“ That I had not settled on a date for sailing,” and Nancy’s face revealed nothing. “ No more had I.”

“ It would be a shame for him to lose his head to that woman,” said the elder, after a few moments’ silence.

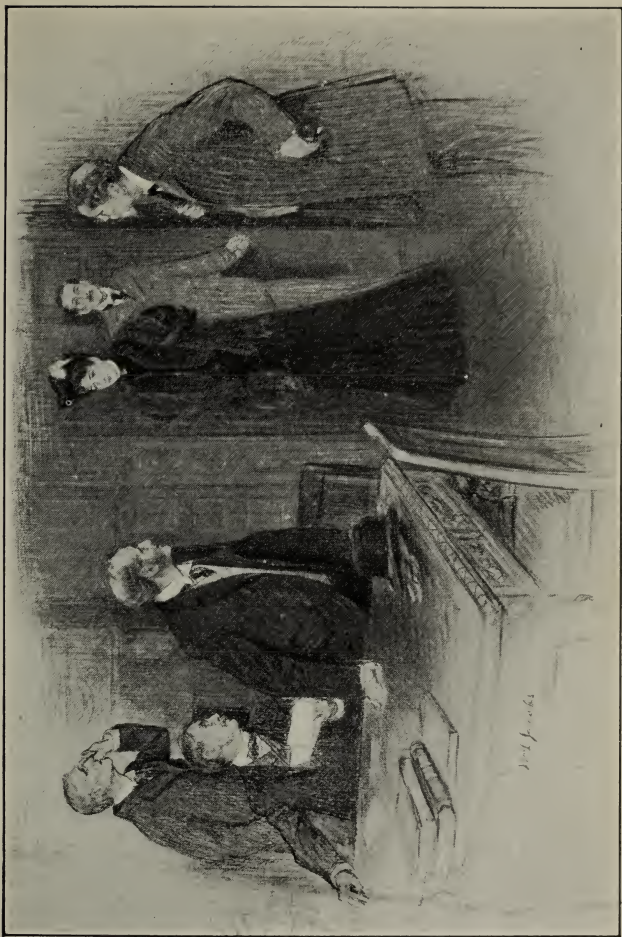
“ Indeed? ” answered the younger indifferently, and the salad was served in silence.

“ The Senator is a great catch,” ventured Mrs. Hopkins, when they were sipping their ices.

“ Oh, there is Mr. Dexter,” was Nancy’s response. “ Let’s send the waiter over for him,” which was no sooner said than done. Whereupon followed a long discussion of affairs at the mill which Mrs. Hopkins found dull in the extreme.

CHAPTER XII.

NANCY PHAYRE attended the stockholders' meeting next day and marvelled to find it so dull. The conservative gentlemen who had been there for many years, however, marvelled to find it so interesting, for Nancy had taken them by surprise several times, after the first shock of seeing her walk in attended by Mr. Dexter had passed. The new superintendent had inherited a small holding, and he was a good talker. Six months' training as president of Quex had given Nancy wonderful command of herself, and she had the advantage of knowing definitely exactly what she wanted — a combination that ought to give any woman the laurels of success. And when she proposed the discharge of all children from the Sphinx Mills, and was supported by



Nancy Phayre attended the stockholders' meeting and marvelled to find it so dull. — Page 136.

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the agent — not with sentimental theories, but with facts and figures, showing how this could be done without loss — they were surprised into allowing a vote to be taken which would give Dexter freedom to make the experiment for a year.

Nancy's next move was to unfold her plan for better housing of the mill-people. As this involved a direct outlay of money, no amount of argument could convince the old men present that her scheme would be worth trying. But she won at last in so far that she was to be permitted to make betterments at her own expense, although some of the wise-acres shook their heads at this idea.

“It won't work, my dear lady,” said Senator Vanderwater, when the meeting adjourned. “You will only waste your money. That class of people prefer to live their way. They'll use your bath-tubs to keep chickens in, and your garden-plats for

ash-heaps in spite of all you try to teach them. The experiment has been tried before.”

“Not here,” said Nancy. “And not persistently anywhere without good results.”

“Ah, Mrs. Phayre, be persuaded in time,” he replied. “They are not worth your time and effort.”

Nancy did not reply. She could not reveal to him the awakening of her own heart even unto the appreciation of the value of “even the least of these.” She bade him good morning and entered her carriage; whereupon the Senator walked briskly toward his office with an indulgent smile, saying:

“All she needs is a good husband to keep her mind and heart busy. Ah, these women!” and he never dreamed that the modern woman with all her complexities is utterly beyond the conception of such men as he.

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It was a perfect May day, and Nancy took a circuitous route out through the suburbs where blossoming trees and shrubbery transformed the common streets into avenues of beauty, coming around at last to luncheon at Mrs. Lexington Blake's. The soft, perfumed air and the blue spring sky above brought renewed confidence in her plans for the future, and she met her old friend gaily, with:

“ Well, I've unsexed myself this morning in good old Mr. Sherman's eyes — and Jack Vanderwater's, too, perhaps.”

“ What now, Nancy? ” asked Mrs. Blake.

“ I've been to a stockholders' meeting of the Sphinx, instead of sending a proxy,” Nancy declared. “ I'm sure some of the nice old gentlemen got a shock they won't recover from right away,” and she went on to give an account of the meeting and her plans for the summer.

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“You ought to send for Parker Clayton and let him advise,” said Mrs. Blake at the end of the story. “He is the most practical man I know.”

“Better than Philip Dexter?” asked Nancy. “He seems to have thought these things out for himself.”

“Clayton has done better than that,” answered her friend. “He has lived them out. However, you should consult with both. I’ll send him around to you soon. Why didn’t you tell me you were going to the stockholders’ meeting? I’d have gone, too.”

“I didn’t know that you would be willing,” Nancy replied. “Or, to be more frank, I thought you might not like to, but would feel compelled to support me by your presence.”

“On the contrary, I should have enjoyed it,” was Mrs. Blake’s answer. “I wonder why I hadn’t thought of it. Because no

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woman ever had been there, I suppose, and the signing over of my proxy has become an established habit. But I'm with you now, and we are in it to win. Tell me your plans."

Nancy went into detail about her scheme for model tenements with much enthusiasm, describing at length the changes she proposed to make in the homes of the Sphinx people.

"Good so far," was Mrs. Blake's comment when she stopped for breath; "but you must let me go into this thing with you. And as I said before, you must have Parker Clayton's advice. We know what we think the poor ought to have. He knows what they actually want — or need, rather. And why don't we get up a stock company and let Quex — or as many of the members as might like it — come in with us?"

"I had thought of that," said Nancy. "But would not we have difficulty with our stockholders if any more women were in it?"

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“ Perhaps,” Mrs. Blake replied. “ But if this is a success, we will organize a company right in Quex for the purpose of providing comfortable and sanitary homes for the working people at moderate rentals.”

All summer they worked early and late to carry out their plans. Every week the two went to some near-by mountain or beach for their Saturdays and Sundays, but Monday morning found them back in town, where they personally attended to many of the details which had been carefully talked over through the summer evenings, on Mrs. Blake’s cool veranda, or in Mrs. Phayre’s apartment, with Clayton and Dexter. Both these men took a deep interest in the plans; Clayton because they gave an opportunity to try several experiments which he had longed to put forth, and because any scheme which should elevate the home conditions of the working people was dear to his heart. And Dexter

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because he was, for the first time, finding the direct road to philanthropy.

There were four great ramshackle tenement houses connected with the Sphinx, all in a state of dire neglect. These Nancy and Mrs. Blake had thoroughly renovated, provided them with set-tubs and other conveniences, and built balconies around them on every floor. These balconies, accessible from each tenement, served a double purpose. They provided a place where, in summer, the tenants could sit outdoors, the housekeepers doing much of their work in the open, and they were connected to form fire-escapes. The factory boarding-houses, too, they had freshly painted and papered throughout. They provided comfortable furniture, with books and second-hand pianos in the parlors, and during the process became acquainted with some of the girls who lived there. And when the autumn came again, and they saw

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their work completed, they both felt that this had been the best summer's work they had ever done.

“It must have cost you a pretty pile,” said Félicie when she looked it over with Nancy.

“Not so very much more than a summer at the fashionable European resorts,” said Nancy, “and, somehow, I feel that I've got a lot more out of it.”

Félicie stared at her in wonder. Certainly something had happened to Nancy. She remembered the day when she and Mrs. Blake had persuaded the disconsolate young widow to take the presidency of Quex, less than a year previous.

“Nancy, you're a delusion and a snare!” she said. “I don't understand you at all. Oh, Nancy Phayre, I heard the whole story about the Graham lady while I was in Paris. The Eltons knew all about her. She has been a regular adventuress. It seems that she finally—”

“ Sh — don’t tell me,” interrupted Nancy. “ Do you know I’ve made up my mind to like that woman, and all other women too. And there is nothing to be gained by my listening to, or your repeating, a scandal; now is there, Félicie? ”

“ Well, no. But Nancy, as president of Quex, don’t you think you ought to know what people say about the members? ” pursued Félicie.

“ Mercy me! If I’ve got to know all the tales and all the malicious reports, and all the scandals that have ever been told about all the members of Quex,” retorted Nancy, “ I’ll go right out of business here and now.”

Félicie laughed. “ I suppose you’re right. And it isn’t anything great of a scandal, after all. Not worth repeating.”

“ Then don’t repeat it. Come in and have some lunch.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN October came in, all russet-brown, and the Quex club-members were settled in their homes once more, Nancy Phayre called her officers together for luncheon and an informal conference. Even the most progressive among them were astonished to find that the membership had more than trebled in a year, and that interest both in the club's future, and in its connection with all active problems of the day, was on the *qui vive*. They were not the first women to discover that the "culture club," which seeks to acquire intellectual advance through the medium of some one woman's mental activity, is being rapidly and effectually superseded by the club which develops it by wrestling with civic and sociological problems; that the best

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“culture” comes from coöperation with the great movements of the age. But, at least, they were thoroughly persuaded of these truths, and nothing could tempt them, collectively speaking, to go back to the aimless contemplation of Ibsen and Dante.

“Tell us about your playground experiment,” said one woman just back from Europe.

“Mrs. Blake will do it best,” said Nancy.

“I never supposed public work could be so easily compassed,” began Mrs. Blake. “Most of you know that I have always been rather conservative, never desiring any part in work of this kind. But really I became so much interested in the children of the slums this summer — but let me tell you. First we went to the owners of some vacant lots down in the most crowded part of the city — back of the Zilpha Mills — and got permission to use them. In another part of town we got the

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use of the Drew school-yards. We appointed a finance committee and raised \$1,000."

"How?" asked two or three at once.

"By soliciting subscriptions. They had little difficulty when business men realized that we were going to keep children off the streets. Of course, we sent out good talkers. Then we put up gymnasium apparatus, swings, seesaws, games, and a shelter. A fine sand-pile was donated, thirty feet long and ten wide, for the lower playground. And we begged from another firm sand enough to make one nearly as large in the other. Then we set off a part of the ground back of the mills for little gardens. You've no idea of the interest the children took in these."

"And did you turn the children into these places without restrictions?" asked a doubter.

"Oh, no!" answered Mrs. Blake. "We had a caretaker present always, from ten in

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the morning until eight at night. Gymnasium instruction was furnished twice a week, and a special police officer was detailed from the city force to care for each playground. There was an average attendance in each of over one hundred children, and the policemen already report a decided decrease in juvenile crime. The experiment has succeeded so well that I trust Quex will adopt this work as a special duty every summer."

"But didn't you have to hire a lot of help?" pursued the doubtful one. "Who did all the work?"

"Your president — and Miss Dean — and Miss Norton, and a score of others," said Mrs. Blake, proudly. "The membership of Quex is equal to anything."

"And now, what new interest are we asked to take up, do you think?" said Nancy.

"Only this morning I received a call from the president of the Good Government As-

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sociation — which, as most of you know, is composed of several hundred prominent men and women of this town — and asked if we would not name a candidate — the most fit member available from Quex — for the School Board. Girls, I'm proud of ourselves."

A chorus of hand-claps echoed the sentiment, and busy tongues were soon discussing the subject.

"Ought we to mix with politics?" asked the doubter.

"Indeed, yes." "Of course." "Why not?" came from several in unison.

"Quex has always been conservative," began the first speaker. "If we commit ourselves to a political move now —" she stopped rather vaguely; perhaps realizing that she had few sympathizers.

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Blake, when the voices became calmer, "that Quex is being recognized — for the first time in its

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existence — as an active force in the town. Of course, this matter should be brought before the whole club; but I trust we shall prove ourselves willing to assume our share of public effort, and do what the Good Government Association asks us to do.”

“Ladies,” added Mrs. Phayre. “I wish we might select Hope Norton as our candidate. We have no one better fitted to represent us on the School Board.”

The suggestion was received with hearty favor, and it was voted to suggest Miss Norton’s name to the club at its opening meeting. Only the doubtful lady demurred, and she emphasized her sentiments by rising and leaving the room when the vote was taken.

When the club met, however, on a bright autumn afternoon, the president and her board of officers found that some other force had been secretly at work. At the proper time for announcing the endorsement of Miss

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Norton by the executive officers of the club it became evident that the idea of a candidate from Quex for the School Committee was not a surprise to the members. On the contrary, they seemed to have been talking about it for some time. And when the secretary brought forward the name of Hope Norton, under the impression that it would be speedily accepted and acted upon, she was surprised by seeing Mrs. Graham rise to her feet.

“Madam President,” she began. “Before a vote is taken I wish to say that the Independent City ticket is to include a woman; and that I have accepted an invitation to allow my name used in that connection.”

“And Madam President,” exclaimed the woman next her, on her feet even before Mrs. Graham was fairly seated. “I move that this club shall endorse Mrs. Graham’s candidacy. We shall gain nothing by dividing our forces.”

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For a moment Nancy's courage quailed. She did not want Quex to be represented by the lady in question; she knew Hope to be a far better candidate; but the opposition, for once, decidedly was getting ahead of her. She glanced at Mrs. Blake, who answered with uplifted eyebrows and an almost imperceptible shake of the head. The speaker was still going on.

“ In Mrs. Graham we have a woman who is deeply interested in public affairs; one who is familiar with educational movements all over the world; one who knows how to work on a committee with men in a way to do credit to this club. I call for the question, Madam President.”

“ One moment, please,” and Félicie Dean was on her feet. “ Would it not be possible for one candidate to withdraw — ? ”

“ Which? ” interrupted a woman from the centre of the hall.

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“It would seem more dignified,” pursued Félicie, “for Quex to follow its leaders. The executive board have given very careful thought to this matter and feel that Miss Norton is a particularly representative candidate. A college-bred woman, her profession keeps her in touch with the most advanced movement and thought in the educational field. She is tactful, dignified, self-possessed and — when it comes to working with men, why, her very career fits her for that. Probably there is not another woman in Quex who knows how to take the all-around man — better than Hope Norton. Yes,” she went on, noticing the smiles about her. “Yes, she does. Most women look at men from the view-point of the married woman who judges all men by the one she lives with. It takes a single woman who goes out into active competition with all kinds of men, to understand them best — to meet men on

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their own ground. Ladies, I move that this club endorse the candidacy of Hope Norton as a nominee for the School Committee at the next municipal election."

Half a dozen women were on their feet as Félicie sat down, flushed and excited. But Nancy tapped her gavel on the table and said in a clear voice:

"Your motion is out of order, as we already have one before the house. What shall be done with the previous question?"

Mrs. Graham immediately called for it, and Nancy was obliged to put it. But as she did so, Félicie jumped to her feet again:

"Before this vote is taken, Madam President," she cried, "I wish to say that I shall next repeat my motion for Miss Norton's candidacy."

"Out of order," called a woman behind Mrs. Graham. The president's gavel came down sharply.

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“All in favor of the motion to endorse Mrs. Graham’s candidacy will please rise and remain standing until counted,” she ordered.

Nineteen women rose with more or less enthusiasm, one dropping out before the count was completed, and refusing to stand again.

“Contrary-minded.”

Fifty-three more stood and were counted. The gavel struck and Félicie was on her feet. Two women seconded her motion and it was put to vote. Fifty-four voted for Miss Norton; eighteen were “contrary-minded,” and fifteen did not vote at all.

Miss Norton was declared the club’s candidate, and the other routine business went on somewhat perfunctorily. When the meeting closed, knots of women gathered and discussed the main topic of the day with eagerness. Some were strongly for

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Miss Norton; others did all they could to influence the uncertain in favor of Mrs. Graham. The latter smiled serenely upon all, saying little, except to hint gently that it was seldom wise to let a set of officers get too strong control of their club. "It is too apt to make independent action and individual thought impossible," she urged. As for Hope Norton, she was not at the meeting. It was not a matter of vital importance to her whether she was nominated or no.

"Mrs. Blake, we've got to fight the Graham forces tooth and nail," urged Félicie on the way home. "Hope Norton *must* get it. Do you know what they are saying about Cordelia Graham?"

"What particular thing?" asked Mrs. Blake. "There seems to be plenty of indefinite opinion, but no actual scandal."

"I don't know about that," said Félicie.

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“ She was dreadfully talked about in London in connection with that French Count who was here last winter.”

“ The one who was mixed up in that Chicago affair? ”

“ Yes. And he is here in town. I saw her driving with him last week.”

“ I saw her at the theatre with him this week,” said Mrs. Blake. “ Still that is scarcely evidence of a scandal.”

“ They say she has a husband somewhere. I tried to tell Nancy all about it,” said Félicie, “ but she wouldn’t listen.”

“ She doesn’t like Mrs. Graham, either,” was Mrs. Blake’s comment.

“ No,” pursued Félicie, petulantly. “ But she says she positively will not listen to damaging stories about any member of Quex.”

“ And she is right,” answered the older woman, heartily. “ Positively, Félicie, Nancy

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Phayre has one of the cleanest, sanest, and healthiest minds I know."

"True," said Félicie. "But that won't elect Hope."

CHAPTER XIV.

“AND Hope must be elected,” said Mrs. Blake to herself, when thinking over the situation next morning. “I wonder what the politicians would do in our case. I’ll ask.”

She was destined to know that very day, for when she went down to lunch with Nancy at the hotel, she found that young woman just receiving a call from the secretary of the Good Government Association, who happened to be one of the wardens in their own church.

“I was rather surprised this morning,” he began, “to hear that Miss Norton was to be your candidate. I had been given to

understand that another club-woman was the unanimous choice of Quex."

"Why? Who told you?" asked Nancy.

"A very handsome and distinguished-appearing woman called at our headquarters a few days ago," was the reply, "and told me that she was already on the Independent slate and that there would be no doubt of her being Quex's candidate."

"No harm done, I trust," said Nancy, "for we chose another candidate."

"Well, no — not precisely. At least nothing but what I could remedy by telephone. You see we are anxious to get out our circulars at once, and she told me so positively I thought — er — that is, I assumed that you had authorized her call, and so I had made up our circular and sent it to the printer, with her name. But I can get it and correct it on the last proof this morning. It will be all right now," he added, noticing the look

of dismay on the countenances of both women.

“Mr. Goodwin,” said Mrs. Blake, solemnly, “that woman was one of the very last whom Quex would wish to endorse.”

“I — well, to tell you the truth, ladies,” he answered, “I thought it rather strange that you should care to be identified with the City Independents. We look to Quex, you know, for the highest type. I am sure nothing could be better than Miss Norton’s candidacy. I knew her. A fine woman — a very fine woman.

“But now that we have nominated her,” said Mrs. Phayre, “we do not want to see her beaten. What shall we do?”

“Yes,” chimed in Mrs. Blake. “How shall we — how would a politician go to work?”

“First, get all the influence you can with leading Republicans, and get them to have

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her put on their regular ticket. Then see that you send out some good speakers to the rallies. Miss Norton wouldn't go, would she?"

"Oh, no," said Nancy. "I do not believe she could be induced to do that."

"Then you must have some one who is a good speaker — some woman?"

Nancy looked at Mrs. Blake. "There is Emily Cunningham," she suggested.

"Yes, and Ada Brownell," said Mrs. Blake. "Both good speakers and could be persuaded. Probably Mrs. Graham will go out for herself."

"She seemed willing when I talked with her," said Mr. Goodwin. "And ladies, this is important; you must get out and vote yourselves."

A long, indrawn, protesting sigh from Nancy.

"Women have the right to vote for school

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committees in this State, I know," hesitated Mrs. Blake. "But I have never —" She stopped.

"But you cannot expect to elect your candidate without it," pursued Mr. Goodwin, puzzled a little. "It is a privilege you should be glad to claim. The whole club should vote, — as individuals in their own wards, of course. And you should do everything in your power to rouse other women to a sense of their duty."

"Mrs. Graham will, no doubt," said Mrs. Blake.

"And I suppose we shall have to," added Nancy. "I don't know what my father would have said, — and George," she added under her breath, "he detested suffragists."

"If you are going into this to win, you cannot afford to leave any stone unturned," urged the secretary of the Good Government Association. "First, get Miss

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Norton on the Republican ticket — that will be the winning one without much doubt. Then get some of your women to appear at the rallies, and speak, of course; and third, remember that your personal votes are necessary, not to say obligatory.” Whereupon he took up his hat and bade them good morning.

“O dear!” cried Nancy in dismay, “I almost wish we hadn’t gone into this thing at all. I don’t want to go to rallies and polls and things. I begin to feel already, as if I were — as some one has expressed it — being soaked in a saturated solution of women.”

“Why, Nancy,” said Mrs. Blake, putting an arm around her. “This is the first time I’ve known you to ‘irk your principles,’ as a certain old preacher always says. Now we’re committed to this thing let’s hold fast. And if you could brave that stockholders’

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meeting, the only woman to cast a vote there — you certainly can drive to the polling place with me and drop your Australian ballot.”

“I will,” said Nancy, cheering up. “You’re an old dear. What should I do without you to wreak my old-fashioned virtues on, anyway?”

But Mrs. Graham was not wasting any nerve force in dreading her campaign. She had already seen one or two Democratic leaders and left them with a decided inclination to work for her, which they good-naturedly supposed originated with themselves. And it happened, at the same hour of this conference between the secretary of the Good Government Association and the president and vice-president of Quex, that she was riding in the park when her keen eye espied Senator Vanderwater walking briskly along the foot-path at one side of the driveway. In another moment she had

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stopped close behind him and was greeting him with charming cordiality.

“Can’t I give you a lift?” she asked. “To be sure, I have only an old-fashioned phaeton, instead of a rapid-firing runabout, as Félicie Dean calls her auto; but you are quite welcome to a seat here,—if you’ll be very good.”

The Senator’s eye glanced quickly over the trim, shining phaeton, noting its dainty appointments, and he stepped into the vehicle with alacrity.

“Some of us are old-fashioned enough still, to prefer a good horse to an auto,” he answered. “I am free to confess I do. And this is a fine animal you have here,” he added with the air of a connoisseur.

“I was raised in Kentucky, you know,” said Mrs. Graham, modestly. “I couldn’t live without a good horse. I do not understand how your Northern women can put

up with the animals some of them do. Why, I know rich women in this town who are riding after steeds that are little more than dray-horses — at least, we should call them so in Kentucky.” She knew the Senator’s weakness for fast horses. “I would not say this, though, to anybody else,” she went on; “I’ve seen you out too many times with your famous pair not to be aware that you know horses when you see them.”

The Senator’s pride was flattered in one of its most vulnerable phases, and he found Mrs. Graham’s company so delightful, that he did not notice that they were being rapidly whirled up the “long drive” toward the upper end of the city’s park system. They talked of horses, and the country; of the Old World, London and Paris and Rome, and the Senator found her equally at home on all these subjects. But not until they were on the homeward drive again did he

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find that in the field of American politics, national, State, and municipal, her interest was fully as keen.

“How do you come to understand politics so well?” he asked at last. “Pardon me, but few ladies, who are such cosmopolites as you, are interested in the every-day affairs of municipal government.”

“I have found it well to understand all the movements of the day,” she answered, smiling. “Why should we women not know politics as well as art and literature?”

“And religion,” he supplemented. “Really, there is no reason why not, and yet we like to think of our women as beings rather apart from sordid business life.”

“Oh, your estimate of women must be formed from the woman’s corner of the *Evening Press*, which, I believe, is made up by a young man who knows as little about women as is possible for any young man in

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this day and generation. I've always understood that none but men ever read that 'woman's corner.' Do you know Hope Norton, — speaking of women's pages?"

"I have met her occasionally," replied the Senator. "Is she a friend of yours?"

Mrs. Graham took her cue from an indefinite note in his voice.

"Oh, no, indeed," she declared. "I believe, though, she is considered a very fine type of what the 'higher education' can turn out for our sex; but with your keen knowledge of human nature, Senator Vanderwater, I really wonder at your question."

The Senator smiled benignly. "Your own keenness," he replied, "must have taught you that asking a fatuous question is sometimes the shortest cut to an understanding between two people. I think each of us is now perfectly aware of the other's attitude toward the modern 'new woman.'"

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Mrs. Graham smiled back into his admiring eyes.

“ I think that is true,” she said, “ and yet, I am wondering what you will say when I tell you that I am a candidate at the coming municipal election for a place on the School Committee.”

“ I am sure we could have no one who could understand the duties of the position, or its value to the public, any better,” he replied, successfully concealing his surprise.

“ Yes, I suppose I shall have to meet with much that is unpleasant,” she answered, pensively.

“ Not if *I* can prevent it,” gallantly and impulsively spoke the Senator.

“ Oh, Senator,” she cried, determined not to let the door of opportunity close on her. “ Oh, if I might count on you? If you would only give me the support of your name? ”

“ Certainly, my dear lady; certainly,”

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answered the Senator. "I will be only too happy to aid you."

"Then I shall depend upon you," Mrs. Graham's voice expressed a fairly juvenile pleasure. "Promise me, please. I shall be so proud if I have your promise. You know Hope Norton is to be an opposition candidate."

"You have my promise," said the Senator. "If I have sometimes seemed to oppose the advancement of women for positions of this character it has been because of the types I have met in the rôle of candidate. And as between you and Miss Norton, I am sure, my dear Mrs. Graham, I could not hesitate."

"Thank you, Senator, so much. And here we are at your hotel. How very, very short the morning has seemed," and Mrs. Graham put out a shapely, well-gloved hand. "Good-by, and remember our compact, Senator."

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“ Good morning,” he answered, with just the slightest pressure of the hand. “ I shall not forget. And I shall do myself the honor of calling on you soon — with your permission.”

“ Thanks,” she replied, discreetly. “ But I seldom receive calls from gentlemen. You see, I live alone, and in the most modest way. You will understand? ”

Another swift good-by, and she was gone. It was not until several hours had elapsed that the Senator realized that he did not even know where she lived.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM that time on the contest was an exciting one. Acting on Mr. Goodwin's suggestion, Mrs. Blake and Nancy set themselves to getting Hope's name upon the Republican ticket. Miss Norton was well liked, and greatly respected among the newspapers, and therefore had the powerful influence of the press on her side, but Mrs. Graham neglected no opportunity of ingratiating herself with the reporters who came to rallies and the Quex meetings, and before long she had achieved an illustrated interview in a leading Sunday paper — the rival, it is hardly necessary to state, to the one which had Hope upon its regular editorial staff.

Nancy had counted, in unauthorized

fashion, upon Senator Vanderwater's support for her candidate, and consequently did not bespeak it until after several other people had been propitiated. But finally, when he lingered after all other guests had gone from one of her "afternoons," she broached the subject.

"You've been very good about my being club president of late," she said, "and have not once held up the dire end that may befall me as an advanced club-woman. So I will now reward you by letting you help me."

"My dear Mrs. Phayre," he responded, eagerly, "you know I am more than delighted to be of the smallest assistance to you."

"To me, personally, I feel sure," answered Nancy. "But in this instance it is to me collectively, so to speak, as president of Quex."

"Ah!" The Senator's voice had an equivocal note.

“ Yes. You see the Good Government Association did us the honor to ask for a member of the School Board from our ranks. Of course, we have recommended our candidate and are doing everything we can to have her elected — and I want to count on your influence. We don’t expect you to go out into the wards, you know; but your name will have weight and if you will be so extremely good as to make a speech or two at some of the rallies, it will help our cause.”

“ I have already promised the lady in question to assist her in every way I can,” replied the Senator. “ I wouldn’t mind speaking a word for her at some of the rallies. She is a charming woman.”

“ A very fine woman in every way,” said Nancy, enthusiastically. “ I shall depend on you.”

“ I’ll see to it at once,” and he went away beaming expansively with the satisfaction

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he felt in patronizing two of the handsomest and most fascinating women he had ever met. He was due at a Democratic rally that very night (Nancy had quite forgotten that he was a Democrat), and he would urge the election of Quex's candidate, with all eloquence — while Nancy went down to dinner with Mrs. Hopkins in a complacent frame of mind, as one who had executed a diplomatic stroke in matters of moment.

Judge, then, of her surprise, in looking over the next morning's paper, to read that Senator Vanderwater appeared at a Democratic rally in the third ward, and that he had not only spoken in favor of placing a woman on the School Board, but had eulogized Cordelia Graham in that capacity. At the first reading Nancy fairly boiled with rage at his duplicity. Had he not promised to speak for her candidate and immediately gone forth to help Mrs. Graham's cause?

And she realized that his influence would have great weight in some quarters of the city. She even began to comment excitedly on the event to Mrs. Hopkins when she suddenly caught herself in the middle of a sentence.

“There!” she cried. “I do believe I am as much to blame as he. Neither of us mentioned the name of our candidate. Oh, what stupidity!”

When Hope Norton and Félicie came in an hour later, they, too, were indignant.

“She has got the Senator in her toils,” exclaimed Félicie. “Wouldn’t you think he had more sense?”

“She’s a very handsome woman,” began Hope.

“And a fascinating one,” added Nancy, “and it’s only fair to tell you that I asked him to do it.”

“*You asked him?*” They both looked aghast.



“ I fairly begged him yesterday,” laughed Nancy, “ to speak wherever and whenever he could for our candidate — telling him we had selected the best woman Quex could find for our candidate. He said she had already asked him to help her, and he had promised to do so.”

“ *Never!* ” interrupted Hope. “ I haven’t seen the Senator for weeks, and do not know him sufficiently well to warrant asking such a thing.”

“ And he said ‘ she is a very charming woman,’ ” said Nancy, turning to Félicie. “ Can’t you see it all now? For neither he nor I mentioned any name. We spoke of our candidate as ‘ she.’ Doubtless Mrs. Graham has worked upon his susceptibilities.”

“ And he went away delighted that he could please two pretty women instead of one,” said Félicie. “ Oh, Nancy, now you’ll have to see him and explain — or shall I? ”

“ You,” answered Nancy. “ But be careful what you say.”

“ Don’t worry about that,” was the reply, “ and, Nancy Phayre, if you weren’t so awfully opposed to a little harmless gossip you would have opened the Senator’s eyes before this to Mrs. Graham’s real position in the club.”

“ I cannot see how,” said Nancy with spirit. “ As club women we prate a great deal about loving each other and the levelling of classes and the demolition of barriers and all that. We say we have established a new sisterhood among women, and that we are all engaged in bringing in a new era wherein gossip and scandal are relegated to the background, and toleration and kindness and new social conditions are the result. But believing this, how can you expect me — in my position — to lower myself by listening to scandal and repeating it? I cannot do

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it, Félicie — not even to elect our candidate.”

“ Well, I hope you’ll never wish you had,” was the reply.

She met Senator Vanderwater at a dinner that very evening and took pains to enlighten him as to the difference in candidates between the varying political parties. The Senator listened courteously, but mentally contrasted Félicie’s sharp tongue with Cordelia Graham’s suave one, and was convinced more strongly than ever that the “woman errant” was far from being his ideal woman. He had lost his mother at an early age and spent most of his boyhood and early manhood away in schools. Still a bachelor, he was far better skilled in politics than in “femininism.” But once out in the street, his thoughts turned regretfully to Mrs. Phayre.

“ I’m sorry indeed, if I bothered her,”

he said to himself. "George Phayre was my friend, and — well, Nancy Phayre stands at the head of 'em all — if she is a little crazy over her clubs. I believe I'll drop in and send up my card."

A few minutes later he was ushered into Nancy's parlor. "I've come," he began, "to ask wherein I did wrong and to beg your pardon if I displeased you."

"It was rather a comical mistake," she laughed back. "I was talking of one woman and you of another. I'll forgive you if you'll remember to praise Miss Norton next time."

They talked of many things, Nancy's delicate wit playing about every subject with a touch and go that made her a delightful conversationalist. It was not until Mrs. Hopkins was called from the room that he referred to the matter of candidates.

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“Then Mrs. Graham is not your candidate?” he inquired. “May I ask why?”

“We feel that Miss Norton is much better equipped,” replied Nancy.

“It is your personal opinion I want, not the club opinion,” responded the Senator. “I can quite appreciate how they may differ.”

“But, by the same token, my personal opinion becomes of no value,” she answered.

“Mrs. Phayre, give up this publicity. Pardon me for saying so, but it does not become you,” he retorted.

“As if it mattered whether it became me or not,” said Nancy, warmly.

“But it does,” and he made a movement as if to take her hand, but she drew back. “All this reaching out for public work but argues the need of something more personal and private to fill your heart. Nancy, take —”

“Oh, my dear,” interrupted Mrs. Hopkins’

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soft, fussy voice as she bustled in, "here is a reporter from the *Breeze*, who says he must see you. I've brought him right in." And the Senator did not finish his sentence.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALTHOUGH the liveliest interest was centred in the contest for School Committee, the work of the legislative committee of Quex was by no means allowed to slacken. The committee of men, an outgrowth of the Presbyterian Synod's conference, were co-operating with them, and a new bill was all ready to present to the Legislature the first of January. The municipal election did not occur until the second week in January, so that the autumn and early winter were devoted to active campaigning. For the first time in years the class-work in Quex had dwindled away, and it was plain that a complete revolution of ideas had taken place in the old club.

“ We prefer Doing to Dante, Being to

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Browning," said Félicie Dean in her characteristic manner. "We've soaked in literary effort long enough; to-day nothing but an orgy of philanthropy will satisfy us. And it's all owing to you, Nancy Phayre."

But the president only smiled. Sometimes she wondered what the outcome of it all would be; whether the pendulum would swing farther without seeing the point of equilibrium. There were days, too, when all this activity of public service did not satisfy the longings of her heart. She began to think wistfully of her old house which had been her home since childhood, the house filled with strangers now, people with no interest in her personal belongings. We may tire of our Lares and Penates under certain mental conditions, but we never realize how dear they are until we see them handled carelessly by profane hands. This truth came home to Nancy Phayre.

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“As soon as their lease is up,” she consoled herself, “I will go back. The woman who cuts herself loose from a good home, causelessly, is a rudderless ship, or a wanderer over the face of the earth. And I’ve learned one thing — no club is big enough or interesting enough to make up to the real, genuine woman for the home. It’s an auxiliary and a training-school. That’s all.” But she carefully avoided giving Senator Vanderwater a chance to complete the sentence into which Mrs. Hopkins had thrust the reporter.

As chairman of the men’s committee on child-labor legislation, Parker Clayton was thrown into her society with considerable frequency. They attended meetings together; they laid plans for conquest of the uncertain legislators; they held conferences; they investigated the conditions of child-labor in the State singly and in pairs. They drafted

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the proposed bill, and they watched together the experiment of the Sphinx Mills, which so far seemed to prove that modern machinery and intelligent direction of skilled labor yield better returns than the pitiful product of the work of little children. And under these circumstances they would have been either more or less than normal human beings if they did not come to take a more than ordinary interest in one another. But as yet neither of them realized this.

“I want to do one more thing for the Sphinx people,” she told him in one of their conferences. “The tenement-house experiment is a success, and as far as we can afford it we must spread that work. But the crying need now is for some place where they can meet evenings — a place which will keep them off the streets and away from the saloon.”

“Are you aware how many of your girls

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are on the streets evenings?" asked Clayton.

"Simply because they have no other place to go," she answered. "What we need is a large room, made pleasant and light and warm, with a few pictures and books and current literature — not too heavy — and a piano. And then to get the girls to feel that it is theirs; not a charity which somebody has condescended to bestow — but their very own, to have as good a time in as possible."

"There would have to be some sort of supervision, of course," said Clayton; "but let it be done by a good woman in their own class. Such a person may not be easy to find, but she exists somewhere."

"And I'll find her, when everything is ready," was the confident reply. "You know what is necessary in a Neighborhood House. Suppose you draft a plan for me."

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To this Clayton agreed, and after he left, Nancy had an inspiration.

“Why shouldn’t Quex do this?” she asked herself. “The club could open and maintain such a place as well as not. I’ll see about that.”

The annual election of officers passed off this year with little excitement. There is an unwritten law in the average women’s club which allows the officer who has served the club fairly well for one year to keep the position another twelvemonth. That is apparently the inevitable result of “rotation in office,” and “limited terms” officers are elected, practically for the full limit, the elections in “off years” being perfunctory and uninteresting to a degree.

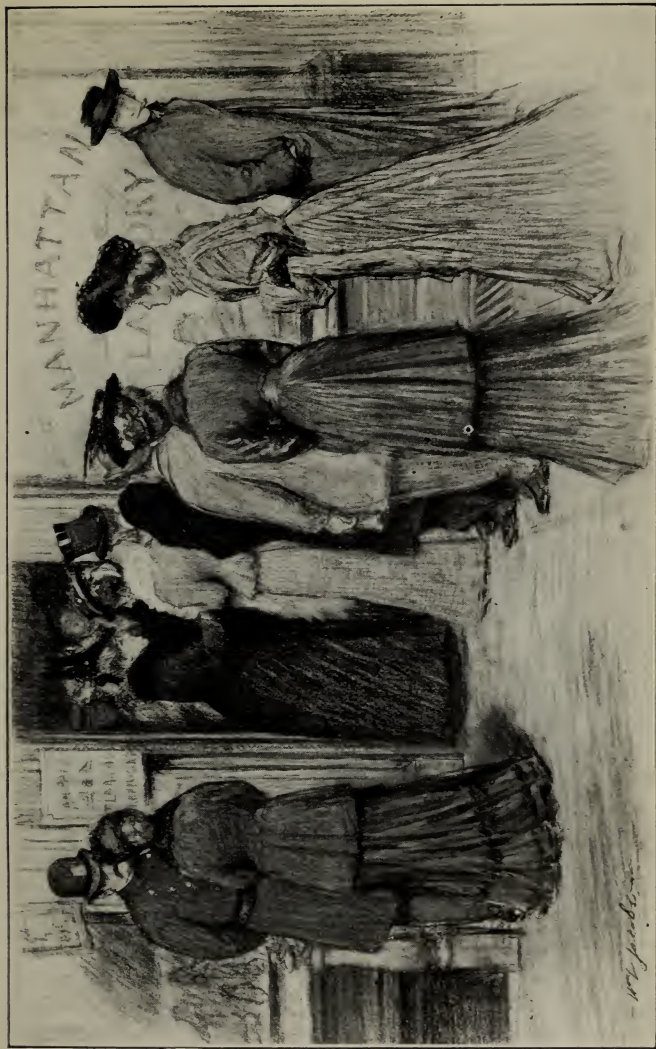
Nancy Phayre, therefore, kept her place as president of Quex, without so much as a sign of protest from “the Graham forces;” indeed there was scarcely a remnant of such

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a faction now in existence. Under Mrs. Phayre's leadership a wonderful amount of practical work had been laid out with fair prospect of accomplishment, and even Mrs. Graham's ambition would not oppose itself to her present popularity. And with her candidacy for the School Board, Mrs. Graham had little time for other plans. For she was not the woman to remain quietly "in the hands of her friends" while there were uncertain and indifferent votes to be captured.

Election day in the city came at last, dawning bright and clear and frosty. Those members of Quex who were most anxious to see Hope Norton elected had opened three little coffee-rooms for the day, close to the three most important polling-places of the city, and they were doing volunteer service in serving hot drinks to such voters as could be inveigled into them. The fervid appeals through the press had stirred the feminine

public to such an extent that hundreds of well-dressed women came to the polls; women of all classes had registered and might be seen all the morning entering the booths with mingled expressions of apologetic uncertainty and new-born civic pride. But few of them had ever voted before, and the day was memorable as marking the suffragic development of the whole town. Some came in carriages, leaving their prancing horses to jingle their heavy trappings outside while they went gingerly to drop their ballot for Miss Norton. Others, handsomely gowned, came on trolley-lines, in trios and quartettes, stopping at the coffee-rooms for a bit of gossip after they had achieved their right of suffrage. Some in plainer clothes, but with intelligent faces, came alone or in pairs, and entering the booths, quietly dropped their slips and were away again with no further parleying — working women who



Women of all classes might be seen entering the booths. — Page 192.

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had little time to waste, but glad and proud to show the world their appreciation of that little part in the election the State accorded to women. It was a sight worth the study of an observant citizen, although few such gave it any heed beyond a moment's curious gaze.

Over in another ward, however, a keen foreigner was watching the day's development with more than a passing interest. The Count de Beauvais, who had been making a special study of the condition of women in America, in order that he might go home to Paris and write a book on "La Belle Americaine," found it worth while to linger a greater part of the morning at the polling-place where Cordelia Graham and her friends, with a few women in the Independent City ranks, were making things pleasant for all who came their way. Never had Mrs. Graham been more gracious and smiling;

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never had she conversed more intelligently with those who admired feminine brains; never had she smiled more magnetically upon those who prefer feminine smiles. And she was wise enough to gauge with some degree of accuracy which of these accomplishments should be called into play most often.

Nancy Phayre was at the largest of the coffee places that Quex was keeping open. She went at nine in the morning and remained until four in the afternoon. She shook hands with hundreds of people and talked politics with the most of them. She had cast her vote early for Hope Norton. And she enjoyed it all with the keen sense of novelty.

“I didn’t know that politics could be such fun,” she remarked to the Senator, when he called after depositing his ballot (whereon Mrs. Graham’s name appeared with the necessary cross). “I don’t know that I blame you men for giving up so much else

that seems desirable, to mix up with this kind of thing."

"You'd make a good ward boss yourself," he laughed back. "I'd never have supposed that Nancy Phayre would 'mix up' as you call it. Tell me, *do* you really like it?"

"Why, yes," began Nancy, and stopped. "That is — for a day. I don't think, though, I would care for this sort of work. I never voted before."

"It didn't hurt you any, did it?" put in Félicie at her side.

"Not a bit. Still—but, Senator, I was disappointed that you went back on me!"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You never righted that mistake about Cordelia Graham," pursued Nancy. "You promised me."

"My dear girl — never," was his answer.

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“What?” Nancy was too astonished to say more.

“Certainly not. You asked me to. But I said nothing.”

“But,” said Nancy, growing more illogical every moment. “I thought you were my friend. You certainly said you would do anything I asked?”

“So I would — anything in reason,” he replied. “But now you are showing the woman; you are bringing in the personal. You expect the impossible. Having made a public speech, endorsing one candidate, — and that candidate on my party ticket, — I could not, merely to gratify a notion — even the notion of the most charming woman in the world — turn about and make a speech again in favor of the opposition candidate. Now, could I? Be fair; could I?”

Nancy smiled. “I suppose that is the way a man looks at it,” she said. “But I

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hope you haven't made speeches any more for the other woman."

"Not on your life," he answered. "Where women enter politics, I withdraw," and he bowed himself out, leaving Nancy rather nearer a real sympathy with him than she had ever expected to be.

"They tell me," said Félicie, bustling up again, "that Mrs. Graham is polling a good vote, and that she is charming all comers over in the Fourth Ward. Oh, Nancy! suppose she should get it after all? And they say Count de Beauvais has been at her heels all day." And away she fluttered to serve coffee to two forlorn and shipwrecked brothers who seemed to be stranded on their little main.

"My dear, don't you worry," said Mrs. Blake. "We've put up a good fight. We ought to win. But if we don't — never mind. We've done our best."

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“ But I cannot bear to see Quex beaten by anybody or anything,” said Nancy. “ We *must* win.”

“ It’s too late for ‘ *musts* ’ now,” answered Mrs. Blake. “ You’re to come over to dinner with me. Hope and Dexter and Clayton have all agreed to come. We’ll have a cozy dinner together after our hard day; and we can get returns by telephone, you know. Go home now, to the hotel; get a bath, and put on your prettiest gown. After such a day of politics you’ve no idea how it will rejuvenate you.”

CHAPTER XVII.

PARKER CLAYTON sat looking at Nancy across Mrs. Blake's dinner-table. He seemed to be listening to a conversation on polemics, but in reality he was watching the play of a dimple on her right cheek, and noting the softness of her brown eyes and the droop of her tired mouth. She wore a gown of some soft clinging gray stuff, made simply and with only a single rope of Roman pearls for ornament. After a more than usually wearisome day in the Settlement he was thinking how restful she was. He did not realize yet, that she, too, had been having a strenuous day, and that the atmosphere of repose he was admiring so much was the physical result of her own weariness. For the first time

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the thought came home to him that a woman like Nancy — nay, Nancy herself — could round out and complete a man's life as God meant it to be.

“ Well, you may be right,” Nancy's voice aroused him now, speaking to Hope. “ But if I were not president of Quex, I would ‘ swear off ’ now and forever, on politics of any sort. If it means getting down into public questions and fairly groveling in the dust, as we've been doing the past three months, then I'm done with trying to blend ethics and municipal affairs into one.”

“ Now, Nancy,” said Félicie, “ you're tired and you're looking through the blue spectacles of fatigue. For my part, I consider this whole thing as a lark.”

“ I don't believe ethics and the higher philosophy combine with politics,” Nancy went on. “ I'm willing to work for reforms in legislative hearings, in ordinary club work,

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in the public and the vacation schools, and among the mill-people; but you must never ask me to go to another political rally nor to a polling-place to work as I have to-day."

"But if women are going to get on," began Hope, "somebody's got to do this sort of thing."

"Now, now," broke in Mrs. Blake, gently, "you're not going to get into a suffrage argument, are you? Let's adjourn to the library for coffee, and Hope, since you abjure the coffee when it is black, suppose you give us some music."

They rose from the table, Hope going straight to the music-room, where Dexter followed. Fitful snatches of piano music quieted the conversationalists for a time, and then Dexter, who had a fine baritone voice, sang old English ballads for half an hour, Miss Norton playing his accompaniments with that rare intelligence which only the

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modest and thoroughly musical soul may acquire. In the library the talk was desultory, Félicie and Nancy gossiping occasionally over their plans for Quex, Mrs. Blake musing by the open fire, secure in the intimacy of these guests who needed not to be entertained; and Clayton with his head resting against the back of the big Morris chair, where he seemed to be listening to the music, but really hearing only the music of Nancy Phayre's soft, yet penetrating voice.

“I wonder if George Phayre knew what he was losing when he died,” he was saying to himself. “He was so different from her. His ideals were so different—what a soothing quality her voice has—what a type of the fine American woman, the very flower of American womanhood. She is devoted to her plans for club work. I don't suppose she ever cares for a home again — What's that?”

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“Yes,” she was answering Félicie. “It is true. I have refused to renew their lease. As soon as their time is up I shall occupy the house myself. Yes, I know; it is big and lonesome, tremendously big for one small woman to occupy alone—but then it is home to me.”

“But you gave it up because you were so lonely,” urged Félicie. “And you seem so nicely fixed at the Esplanade.”

“As nicely as one could be in a hotel,” Nancy answered. “But, Félicie dear,” and her voice was very soft, “when one has known the whole meaning of that blessed word ‘home,’ no hotel can possibly be endurable for more than a brief period. There is no other place on earth for me but that house, and I have learned that if I can’t be happy right there I never can anywhere.”

“Well, that’s where you and I differ,” said Félicie. “As for me, give me a fine

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suite of rooms, good service, plenty of friends, and something doing all the time. I should mope in that great house alone, as I'm afraid you will, Nancy. As you did, you know."

"As I *did*, yes," said Nancy. "But not as I shall again. I've had my lesson. My dear old home is all I have left — but I'll keep that, and I'll be happy in it, too — comparatively," she added under her breath.

Why should Clayton's heart thrill at the words? He had not known a home since he had left his grandfather's house for preparatory school at fourteen. His quarters in the Settlement House had come to seem nearest like the place he could call home for many years. Heretofore he had given little thought to the meaning of that little word of four letters — that greatest word in the English language. But suddenly, to-night, an irrepressible yearning filled his breast. Why should he give his whole life to the poor and

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have no place of his own where he could hide from the storms of life — where he could find rest and courage and renewed strength as other men had? He was thirty-five now; must he go down life's long stretch alone? And yet there was but one woman — he was roused by Mrs. Blake, who sat up suddenly in her chair.

“There's the telephone. Félicie, will you see to it, please? It is Mr. Goodwin, probably, with news of the election returns.”

In five minutes, Félicie was back. “In two wards the Republicans are leading, in one the Democrats are ahead; the rest are still uncertain. Why can't we all go down to Music Hall? There's a vaudeville on, with the returns displayed between the acts.”

“We can do better,” said Clayton. “The Young Men's Club is having an entertainment to-night, with the returns coming in all the time. We couldn't get in at Music Hall,

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the crowd is so great. But I happen to belong to the Young Men's Club—get your things if you'd like to go."

"Call Hope," said Mrs. Blake, "and we'll all be ready in five minutes."

In twenty minutes more they were all entering the lecture-hall in the Young Men's Club house. It was crowded, but Clayton managed to find seats somehow, and they were soon laughing at the comic song and dance from the platform, which served as a time-killer. Pretty soon Nancy felt Félicie tugging at her sleeve.

"Look over there, will you? At the right of the platform."

Nancy looked in the direction indicated. There in a low-cut evening gown, the most striking figure in the room, sat Mrs. Graham. On one side of her sat Senator Vanderwater, smiling and unconscious of Nancy's proximity. On the other side sat the Count de

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Beauvais, his eyes fastened admiringly on Nancy's face. She looked away, half-conscious of a disagreeable shock. Somehow it was not pleasant for her to see the Senator at Mrs. Graham's side. She did not care for him, she thought—and yet—

Election returns were displayed from time to time on a bulletin-board prepared for that purpose. It was too early to get definite figures, Clayton told them, but by twelve o'clock it was settled that the city had gone Republican.

“But aren't we to know about our candidate?” asked Nancy.

“We cannot go to sleep until we do,” added Félicie.

“I'll go and telephone to Goodwin,” offered Dexter. “We shall not be able to get figures on the School Committee to-night. But he will probably have something approximate.”

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“And in the meantime we’ll go down to the Esplanade and have a Welsh rabbit or something,” said Clayton. “I’ll escort the ladies, and you can meet us there.”

“I declare,” said Mrs. Blake. “I did not expect, at my age to be so dissipated as this! I’m generally sound asleep before midnight.”

“But you don’t go and vote every day,” laughed Nancy. “Such an event coming for the first time when a woman is sixty-five, ought to be celebrated after midnight.”

—“with due pomp and ceremony,” added Hope, as they entered the Esplanade.

“Here you are,” said Dexter. “Goodwin doesn’t know definitely. He thinks, however, Hope—Miss Norton, is ahead and sure of election.”

Half an hour later, as they sat around their table, the gorgeous dining-room filled

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with people, Mr. Goodwin made his way over to them. "I've just heard," he said, "Miss Norton has won. I congratulate you all."

They all chimed in with congratulations for Hope.

"But how about the Graham lady?" asked Félicie.

"I think she has won, too. Instead of one woman on the board, we are to have two."

"There she is now," said Hope. "She is bearing down on us."

Down the aisle came Mrs. Graham, followed by the Count, looking small and insignificant, in her wake. At their table she paused and held out her hand to Hope.

"Let's exchange congratulations," she said, cordially. "The voters took so kindly to the idea of having a woman on the School Com-

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mittee that they elected both of us, and some good man got left.”

At the door the Senator had said good night to Mrs. Graham. He had seen Nancy there, just as he was going to enter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the returns were all in, however, it was found that Mrs. Graham lacked twenty-nine votes of the amount necessary to elect her, and that Miss Norton had a handsome majority.

“It is better so,” said Mrs. Blake, when she and Nancy talked the matter over next day. “I would rather have only Quex’s one candidate on the board. We would scarcely know whether we had beaten or not, if both were there.”

“And still, Mrs. Graham must feel rather cut up this morning,” replied Nancy, “especially after boasting to us about it.”

“I am thinking of what is best for the Club,” replied Mrs. Blake. “One woman’s

personal ambition is scarcely to be compared with that. Besides, this ought to be a check to those cavillers who still insist that the club is the only field where women whose pasts will not bear investigation may rise to prominence. An absurd charge in itself, which ought to need no refutation."

Mrs. Graham bore her defeat nobly, however, wasting no time in vain regrets, but going on to take up the next thing, which happened to be the work of the child-labor committee. The time was drawing near for another legislative hearing, and she was preparing for that.

"You men never sit down and waste time with vain regrets when you get beaten in politics," she said to the Senator one evening. "Why should I?"

"But you are a woman," he answered. "We do not expect you to be philosophical, nor logical. You may weep with impunity."



“ You are quite medieval in your views of women.” — *Page 213.*

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“Rot,” replied she, calmly. “I’ve not the slightest desire to weep. I had a fair trial and got a good showing of votes. If there were not enough to elect me — why perhaps there will be next time. Meanwhile, I can find plenty to do.”

“I can’t understand why so charming a woman as you are should desire to go into politics and public questions,” began the Senator.

“There, now,” she interrupted — “my dear Senator, really you are trying! You are quite medieval in your views of women. But you have never been married. You have no experience as a background, so I forgive you.”

“That could easily be remedied, if you —” he began, but she interrupted him, gliding away from the subject in a way that served to fascinate him the more.

“Here we are nearing that legislative hear-

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ing for the child-labor bill, and I've a lot more to do on that first. And Senator, I'm going to ask you as a friend to help us on it—"

"I? — er, no. That is, I'm not heartily in favor of it," protested the Senator. "I'm rather in the position of an employer of labor—you see."

"Well, so's Nancy Phayre," retorted the lady. "And look at all she's done and is doing. You can't deny that her experiment is a success."

"Well, yes," he admitted. "It works well so far, but it remains to be seen whether it pays."

"Now, you're hedging, my dear Senator," pursued Mrs. Graham. "Honestly now, don't your books show just as good profits as ever?"

"How did you know?" he asked.

She smiled. "I suppose Nancy has told

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you," he went on. "Women love to exchange gossip."

"And now you're medieval again," she laughed. "Still, what young Dexter knows Clayton knows. And, of course, Nancy knows. And—but you're going to come out in favor of the child-labor bill, now aren't you?" She flashed one of her most fascinating smiles at him.

"I'll think about it," he promised. "I'd do a good deal to please two such women as you and Nancy Phayre."

Mrs. Graham turned away to hide the mocking grimace that came involuntarily to her lips. But she was too wise to utter a word.

But there was another way by which Nancy Phayre saw that Quex could be of use to the city. During the campaign for School Committee she and her co-workers found that there was great need of non-partisan effort to

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secure good citizenship. The Good Government League only attempted preliminary work for the city elections, but rested on its oars when that was over. Nancy, who seemed to have developed a wonderful ability for scenting out disagreeable facts that were hidden beneath the surface of municipal politics, found by a little quiet investigation that the assessors' lists had not been revised for a number of years. And she conceived the idea that this was work that Quex could do.

At the very next meeting of Quex, she proposed the establishment of a "Civic and Legislative Committee," which should take charge of this work, and of such other, like the vacation schools and her Neighborhood House, when it should be proposed. The idea was immediately accepted, and Mrs. Blake was constituted chairman of such a committee. Power to constitute sub-com-

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mittees was given them, and this new department became immediately popular. The club now numbered over seven hundred members, and these represented the most active and public-spirited women in the whole city, who were ready to take up with enthusiasm any good work which seemed necessary.

When the appointed day came for the legislative hearing for friends of the proposed child-labor bill, the largest committee-room in the State-house was not big enough to hold the crowd of people, who overflowed into aisles and corners and corridors. One of the ablest lawyers in the State had charge of the petitioners' side of the case, and even the Senator occupied a prominent seat, having been finally won over by Nancy Phayre.

Not only did these lawyers, but Parker Clayton and Philip Dexter make able speeches for the bill, and they were followed by the

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president of Quex, by Miss Norton of the School Board, and by Mrs. Graham.

Dexter told in graphic language of the former employment of children at the Sphinx Mills, and brought figures to prove that modern machines run by adult men and women yielded better returns for the factory. Parker Clayton made an impassioned plea for the children of the tenements, setting forth their pitiful condition and their unconscious cry for help.

“This bill which we are urging upon the Legislature,” said he in conclusion, “makes it unlawful to employ children under sixteen in any factory, mercantile establishment, workshop, store, or office, or in the distribution of messages or merchandise, or during school months, in any capacity, without a certificate or a permit from the Board of Health or the Superintendent of Schools. Children under sixteen must not be employed

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after 9 P. M. or before 6 A. M., and where children under sixteen are employed, the employer must keep on record a certificate issued by the school superintendent or principal, showing that the requirements as to elementary education under the compulsory school law have been met; and also a definite statement of the child's date of birth, fortified with affidavits by parents or guardians, where a transcript of the official registration of birth is not obtainable. I am aware that many objections are urged to this bill. The newspapers describe it as 'proposed legislation to deprive thousands of juveniles of employment,' as if it were a great wrong. If we can't support ourselves without making the children work for us, we ought to be ashamed. It is terribly hard for us to give up a bad habit, and when we have to give it up for very shame, we cling to as much of it as we possibly can. When all other objections are gotten rid of, we

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piously insist that the children of widows and infirm parents should be allowed to stultify themselves and stunt themselves, and grow up into more or less defective men and women. But why should the support of those who we all agree ought to be helped, be thrown on the few poor little children they happen to have? Why should we not rather devise some way by which all of us who have means or are able to work should work together for this, and let the children of these unfortunate ones have all the advantages that we acknowledge ought to be had by other children? This is a duty which we have no right to shirk."

"In the case of Quex," said Nancy in her turn, "we are determined to secure the birth registration requirement, which is the only possible safeguard against the employment of under-age children. Investigation has proved that in manufacturing communities

children are taken out of school long before they reach the proper age on the false statements of selfish, greedy parents who desire to add the children's wages to their incomes.

“The birth certificate, in comparatively few cases impossible to produce, is the only check on this practice; and if the requirement works temporary hardship on a few, it results in permanent good for the great majority. We have found, too, in some cases, that unscrupulous notaries are selling so-called ‘employment affidavits’ or ‘certificates’ which are prepared by these notaries and which are supposed to be of value to children who desire employment. It cannot be stated too clearly that those affidavits are absolutely worthless either to the parent or to the employer. The Board of Health is required by the Child Labor Law to ascertain the age of the child by appropriate evidence furnished

it and to make an examination of the child itself as to its health. The board will not issue this employment certificate until it has had filed with it also the school record of the child. Our committee will stand ready to prosecute the unscrupulous notaries who prepare these affidavits and sell them on false representations to ignorant parents, charging extortionate and illegal fees for their alleged services."

"I will add that it has been definitely settled in a long line of cases that an employer who employs a child under sixteen years of age can gain no protection by any claim that he 'acted in good faith' and by relying on a false affidavit," said the counsel of the Child Labor Committee. "The Court of Appeals in New York and courts in other States throughout the country have decided repeatedly, for example, that in prosecutions against liquor dealers for selling liquor to minors,

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it is no defence that the liquor dealer did not know or did not believe that the child to whom the liquor was sold was under age. The defence that the employer relied on a false affidavit of age and employed in good faith was set up by the Jute Mills in a case brought against it by the city for employing children in violation of the compulsory education law. This case is a good sample of what some employers are willing to do to try to beat the Child Labor Law. The Jute Mills produced on trial an affidavit with an enormous red seal attached, sworn to by a parent, that an undersized, undeveloped Italian girl actually eleven years of age, was over sixteen. This Jute Mill was fined, notwithstanding the affidavit. The judge who tried the case said, in his opinion, that the Child Labor Law permits the employment of children between fourteen and sixteen years of age if a certificate executed by the Board of Health officer

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is filled in the office of the employer. The affidavit in question would not even answer the requirement of the labor law. When this bill becomes a law and a child seeks employment whose appearance is such that the employer has a doubt as to its being old enough to be entitled to work, the safest thing for him to do is to require the production of an employment certificate from the Board of Health before giving employment."

"As a member of Quex's special committee on child labor," said Mrs. Graham, "I desire to bring to your attention the fact that every fifth child in the United States, between the ages of ten and fifteen years, is a breadwinner. Of these juvenile wage-earners every third child is a girl. This is an increase of 33 1-3 per cent. in ten years. There are in the workshops and factories in this State alone, six thousand women and children, more than 50 per cent. of whom are working

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for a mere sustenance. The labor laws of our State are far in advance of many, yet our State inspectors, of whom three are women, find many laws broken and call attention to many existing evils which there are no laws to prevent; and this is what we are trying to bring about."

"I wish to call your attention to one more thing," said the attorney, in closing. "Last year we had the presence of a body of interested women at our hearing. This year we have a much larger body of *well-informed* women who know what they want and who have spent much valuable time in working for the end in view. In short, last year we had sentiment; this year we have experience. The time is ripe for the adoption and application of a new law regulating child labor. We leave it with you, gentlemen, whether you shall listen to the voices from all over our fair State, urging you to recommend our bill."

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“Some of these stories are enough to break one’s heart,” said Félicie at the adjournment. “I love to hear Parker Clayton talk but I hate to have my feelings harrowed.”

“I hope they are not true, they are so perfectly dreadful,” said another.

“Of course they are true,” put in Mrs. Graham. “If you don’t believe so, why, just take the trouble to investigate. Oh, good morning, Senator. Are you going my way?” and before he had a chance to speak with Nancy, Mrs. Graham had hurried him away.

“Somehow,” said Nancy to Clayton, as they passed out of the hall, “I shall be disappointed if we are given leave to withdraw this year. I feel that this committee is in sympathy with us.”

“I trust so,” was his reply. “Still you can never tell. There is nothing more uncertain than a legislative committee. Rich manu-

facturers as a rule are against us, and they do not hesitate to use money and underhand methods — that is, some of them. I beg pardon. I am too sweeping in my statements. If all manufacturers were like you, Mrs. Phayre, we should not need such laws.” And he fell to admiring the pink flush that swept her fair face.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was the day for the monthly business meeting at Quex, early in May. Crocuses had come and gone, grass was green everywhere, tulip borders and pansy beds flourished in the public parks, and peach and plum trees were blossoming in the suburbs of the city. "The fret of the spring" was in the air and even the new spring gowns and bonnets which made the club meeting like a flower garden in July reflected the general desire to branch and bud and blossom into new activities that affects most of us in the early spring. It was "cleaning house time," and although the members of Quex seldom scrubbed floors or washed windows or swept down cobwebs in their own houses literally,

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they were eager to do so figuratively and for the public good. The vacation schools had been so successful the previous summer that a vote to carry them on again was unanimously adopted and a committee given charge of it as the first item of business on this particular afternoon.

And then Nancy Phayre outlined her plan for a Neighborhood House.

“I had intended,” she explained, “to build it myself down at the Sphinx Mills, using it only for those factory people. But they are in the midst of a large district where the people are all dreadfully in need of something of the kind, and it has occurred to me that the members of Quex might form a stock company. All who wish can join it. We will have our shares as low as ten dollars, so that everybody can have a chance to come into it, and we might in that way become a powerful influence for good in that quarter. Last

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year, as some of you know, I became interested in the tenement-house problem down there. You have no idea of the unsanitary conditions of such places until you have been there, as I have. I could not rest nights thinking of what the children of that district had to live among — and their mothers. As many of you know, I rebuilt certain tenements — as an experiment. I constructed them on right principles and as near the ‘model tenement’ as I could. Since that time I have personally collected the rents and have thus become acquainted with the tenants. This has resulted well, as other experiments of the kind have done. The tenements are well kept, and the percentage of losses by non-payment of rents is very low. I am hoping to get the stockholders to combine with me next year, and to rebuild all the tenement-houses connected with the Sphinx property. Now, this work has brought home to me very

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closely the need of doing more for these people. The young folks, especially, have no place to go — no centre of any kind. They roam the streets, or resort to pool-rooms and saloons because they have nothing better and, I admit, because too often they know nothing better. Now we are a club of well-to-do people. Instead of building ourselves a club-house, as I know some of you would like to do, let us first go down and help our working sisters to better their own conditions. They need a club-house much more than we do. Let us forget ourselves for awhile and build, instead of a woman's club-house, a Neighborhood House for our less fortunate sisters."

"Of course, there is the social settlement of which Mr. Clayton is the head," said Miss Norton, following Nancy. "But he is on the other side of the city, and his work, wonderfully efficient as it is, does not extend to

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the region we are discussing. May I outline the plan — your plan, Madam President?”

Permission being given, Hope went on. “First we will organize a stock company. To start the thing, I have a book here to-day in which the members may subscribe for as many shares as they care to take at ten dollars each. There is a very good building which we can buy for \$7,000 in that district. Two thousand dollars, or at most \$3,000, would pay for all the repairs we need, and the furnishing. Now, we can raise this amount, and I will move, Madam President, that we organize a stock company among ourselves and start ‘Neighborhood House.’”

“Suppose we do not raise enough by subscription, what then?” asked a woman on the front seat. “And before taking a vote, Madam President, will you tell us how the house is to be run when it is built? Shall we have resident workers, or what?”

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“If the subscription does not reach the required amount,” said Hope, at a sign from Nancy, “we can hold a fair. It will be easy to raise a couple of thousand dollars that way, or if necessary we can take subscriptions from outside.”

“No, no,” cried several voices.

“We would much prefer to make it entirely a work of Quex’s very own, of course,” said Hope. “I was only speaking of an unexpected emergency. Because, ladies, I am sure we can raise that money. As to its management, that can easily be settled after we get the house. It is not necessary to go into that now.”

There were other speeches — some of them enthusiastic ones, and other questions asked. But when the motion was finally put to vote, it was carried by a very large majority. Whereupon Hope immediately announced that she would retire to an antechamber for

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the purpose of receiving subscriptions, then and there.

“Strike when the iron’s hot,” said Félicie, following her. “Put me down for fifty shares. How’ll that do for a starter?”

Inside, Nancy had called for a report from her new civic and legislative committee.

“We have organized into a working association,” said Mrs. Blake, rising, “and propose to extend our working membership into every ward in the city. We ought to have but one requirement for membership, and that the desire to work for civic betterment. We have a membership of 832 in thirty-six organized branches. These are neighborhood branches of five or more women who work to better existing local conditions. We are already working against the smoke nuisance, sale of tobacco to minors, gambling, slot machines, etc., are planning for clean streets, public school improvement, extension

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of the park and playground system, probation officers, and police matrons. Each ward in the city will be organized with a chairman, vice-chairman, recording and corresponding secretaries, and treasurer. Each division in the ward will have its chairman, under whom local work is done. So far we have had no unwilling members, and indeed everybody seems to be imbued with a great desire to become workers in our cause. We have already started the work of revising the assessors' list. In some cases our members are to do it, but oftener we are employing paid canvassers. We have secured the cooperation of five church clubs, and two classes of young men and boys from the Young Men's Union have promised to help. So that by October we shall be able to present the assessors with a correct up-to-date list of voters. And at that date, I shall hope to present you with a report of actual work,

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thoroughly accomplished." She sat down amid a chorus of feminine applause and Nancy was about to ask for further remarks when a messenger boy appeared at the door. Félicie took from him a yellow envelope, and noticing that it bore the State-house insignia in one corner, hurried to the president's desk.

Nancy tore it open and read the message with flushing cheeks. Then she rose and said:

"Ladies, this is for all of us. Listen:

" 'MY DEAR MRS. PHAYRE: — I am happy to be the first to send you what I know will gladden your heart, the news that the child-labor bill has passed both houses of the Legislature. I have just had the pleasure of voting for it. It awaits only the Governor's signature to become a law.

" 'Cordially yours,

" 'VANDERWATER.' "

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When she finished, a subdued cheer was heard from one corner, and the whole audience rose to its feet with waving handkerchiefs. And when the tumult had subsided sufficiently for any woman's voice to be heard, it was Félicie Dean who spoke :

“ Madam President,” she said. “ I congratulate you. Not only have we won the victory at the State-house, but Miss Norton's book shows, already pledged for Neighborhood House, the amount of \$6,500.”

Again the tumult of applause filled the room, and it was some moments before Nancy could speak ; but in the meantime she had instructed Félicie to put her name down on Hope's book for \$500.

“ Ladies,” she said, when there was a chance to make her gavel heard. “ The Neighborhood House fund has just been increased to \$7,000. I think we shall have no difficulty in establishing this work. I

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congratulate you all on the work you have done for the child-labor bill. The committee has done nobly and has devoted a tremendous amount of time and energy to it; but I want to thank you personally, every woman present or absent, who has helped the good cause by word or deed; and you have all done that. It is not always those of us who go out into the world, where our work can be seen of men, who deserve praise. It is the quiet home influence, the personal influence of a good woman, whose work will tell in the long run. And those of you who have been on no committee have done your part. And this leads me to ask here for another new committee. We ought to pay more attention to the home, domestic science, sanitation, and the best ways of living. There is going on silently in the homes of this country a work of æsthetic value which is already being felt in circles more exclusively artistic. This

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work, the development of taste through a pure, intelligent culture on advanced art lines, is being vigorously prosecuted by the General Federation of Women's Clubs. These clubs with their million or so members, already report that the various 'sections' devoted to special investigation, with a view to advancing in a practical way the higher interests of the home, show the largest and most regular attendance. The papers read and suggestions made are warmly received, and their influence is almost immediately felt in the homes and in the towns. Better taste is shown in home building, home decoration, village improvements, and in the class of pictures sought and enjoyed. All this is in direct line with the work of Mrs. Blake's committee, and in our zeal to reform and uplift our neighbors we must not forget the home."

They appointed the Domestic Science Com-

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mittee, after they had constituted the special one (with Nancy Phayre at the head) for Neighborhood House. And before they adjourned for the summer, they had plenty of work laid out which must bring in splendid results in the autumn.

On their way home Hope turned to Nancy and asked:

“Is it true that you are going back to your house and give up your rooms at the Esplanade?”

“Yes; thank Heaven,” replied Nancy. “I have lived in a hotel as long as care I to. But I’m not going to stay in my house this summer. I need a change and yet cannot go very far away. So I have taken a cottage for the summer down at Naugatuck. I can come in easily in one hour and I can live quietly the rest of the time. And I want you to come and spend the summer with me.”

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“If you mean that for an invitation, I will accept now, with thanks,” answered Hope, “before you have a chance to repent and withdraw.”

“I do mean it,” said Nancy. She had come to realize some of the many ways by which a rich woman may ease the path of the working one in what are supposed to be the higher walks of wage-earners.

“Then it’s a compact,” said Hope. “And I can’t thank you enough, for I’d expected to stay in my one room in town, except for the two weeks’ vacation which is all I can hope to have.”

CHAPTER XX.

IN three weeks more Nancy Phayre had opened her cottage at Naugatuck, with Mrs. Hopkins and Hope for company. She had cause to be grateful for this when the first oppressive heat came on, finding herself somewhat exhausted with the close application to her work and her voluntary confinement in the city for a year and a half. It was then that she began to realize that a woman may be guilty of intemperance in more ways than one, by giving herself without reserve to causes which seem to demand it imperatively, and yet which could afford to wait under a little less strenuous conditions.

“I begin to see now,” she told Hope one evening as they watched the moon rise from

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the rim of the sea, "where a woman may be doing wrong in giving herself too freely to club work. If the woman has a family who need her, if she has children, or a husband, or any one dependent upon her for comfort or inspiration or support, she cannot afford to devote herself too generously to causes. With me it has been different. I needed just this sort of stimulus."

"Yes, and there are others who do," answered Hope. "The woman's club is a blessed boon to the woman who has raised a family of children, who no longer need her at home; to the widow who, under the old conditions, would pine in solitude; to the spinster who is dependent on the charities and the social opportunities of the boarding-house or small flat. And through these, it becomes a great influence for good in a community. Look at Mrs. Blake, a solitary, though cheerful widow; at Félicie, an up-to-date bachelor

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maiden without the slightest inclination to preside over any man's home; at yourself, who would have buried yourself in grief over the inevitable; at me, who am an independent working woman. The club has been our salvation, in a way."

"Yes," admitted Nancy. "But there are a good many young mothers in Quex. Most of these are sensible enough to come only for the inspiration and relaxation they get at the meetings. I never put them on committees or ask them to do club work. I do not believe they ought to give themselves to work outside their own homes."

"Any more than you would deny them the refreshment and stimulus of meeting with us once or twice a month," said Hope. "Club work is a delight to me. I have time for it. I like it. But my sister, who has four children and a husband whose digestion seems to suffer from her absence at his table, has all

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she can do to look after them. 'You may do the looking after the Borrioboolah Ghas,' she said the last time I saw her, 'I have neither time nor strength to ameliorate the condition of children in the slums. That work is for unmarried women or childless ones, at any rate. As for us young mothers, by the time we have ameliorated the conditions of our own children and pacified our husbands, it is time to go to bed — and we are tired enough to do it, too.' "

They sat quietly awhile, secure in a friendship which does not demand incessant chatter. Soon Nancy spoke:

"I expect we shall lead a very quiet life down here this summer. I need the rest and do not object, but I am sometimes afraid you will tire of it. Félicie and Mrs. Blake will run down occasionally, but they do not care for the sea. By and by, we can have weekend parties, but they are likely to be dull.

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It needs a man at the head of the house to make such affairs a success. There used to be a time when men accepted with alacrity invitations to stay over Sunday at country homes. They found the taste of home life very much to their liking. Now they prefer their clubs and their bachelor apartments, with their superlative degree of comfort and freedom from restraint, to homes where courtesy is due the hostess and gallantry expected by the feminine guests. What seems to bother them worse than that is the amount of clothing needed for even a short visit, when the time is filled up with social amusements. Men are tiring of it all, and that accounts for the state of affairs which has reigned at summer resorts for years. Some day women will find recreation in which men play no part, and everybody will be satisfied; and I suppose our club interests will help along that day."



“Do you really want that time to come?” asked Hope in a low voice. — *Page 247.*

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“Do you really want that time to come?” asked Hope in a low voice.

Nancy laughed gleefully. “Well, to tell you the honest truth, I don’t think I do. So long as we’re the least bit feminine, we shall want the society of interesting men. And when we cease to be feminine — well I don’t care to be here.”

“Nor I,” laughed Hope. She was tempted to tell her hostess what Philip Dexter had said about coming down to the cottage occasionally; but on second thought she decided to let him speak for himself.

“You’ve no idea,” she said, instead, “how many letters I get at the office, inquiring how to pronounce the word ‘Quex.’ One woman, to-day, asked if the right pronunciation isn’t ‘Kway?’”

“How funny,” answered Nancy. “When it is so plainly *Kweks*.”

“Another woman said they had a wager on

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at her club as to whether it should be called *Kwee* or *Kex*. Of course I wrote her it was neither; and I have a paragraph in to-morrow's club column giving the pronunciation just as it is written, *Quex*."

"To go back to what we were saying of club life," said Nancy, after a little, "I hope I didn't give a wrong impression. I would encourage the young woman to belong to some club by all means. It is impossible to estimate the value of child study in the club to the young mother. She learns how to feed, clothe, and train her children more scientifically; how to study and understand their varying dispositions; how to take large common-sense views, rather than the sentimental; how to give to the world well-poised, cheerful, useful men and women. While to the middle-aged mother, whose children have left the home for the work of life, whose hands are empty, who would spend lonely hours and

suffer heartaches, the club brings interest in life, pleasure and enjoyment, and best of all, useful work and a healthier body and mind. So much and more has the club done for the mother.”

“Yes; and to the conservative woman,” added Hope. “What doesn’t the club bring her? Besides a gradual broadening of the mind it teaches her the individual point of view, the knowledge of causes and results, the need of intelligent study of social conditions, and a living interest in life. Blessed be the women’s clubs, say I.”

“Amen,” said Nancy. “And now let’s go to bed. It’s getting late.”

They found the summer a busy one, after all, with so many plans for service to others to carry out, and neither did they lack for company. As soon as the weather became warm, such of their friends as happened to be in the city gladly availed themselves of

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the opportunity to run down to the pleasant beach cottage for a day, and there was constant coming and going, with all the varied changes of mental atmosphere consequent thereon. Dexter came frequently, on various pretexts, and with him came sometimes Parker Clayton and occasionally Senator Vanderwater. The train-service at Naugatuck permitted their coming down in time for supper (for Nancy would not tolerate heavy seven o'clock dinners on warm summer evenings), and sitting on the cool veranda overlooking the ocean until nearly ten o'clock, when they could go back to town, all the better for a few hours of sea-air and the light interchange of talk with Nancy and her guests.

Twice a week Nancy went to town, visiting the vacation schools and playground, or her model tenements; but her most important work was the building of "Neighborhood House." The special committee in charge

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were mostly staying in town, and devoting much of their time to it. To Nancy no keener interest had ever come than watching this pet project develop and grow from the forming of the stock company to the breaking of the ground and laying the corner-stone of the structure (with due pomp and ceremony); after which the building seemed to develop as if by some magical power. And so the time ran away until the first week of August. Nancy had been in town one morning, returning just after luncheon. She had freshened up a bit after a dusty trip, and was sitting on her side veranda alone. Hope was still at her desk in town, and Mrs. Hopkins was making a visit to friends somewhere in the interior of the State. But Nancy did not belong to the class of women who cannot bear to be left alone for a moment, finding no resources, no comfort within themselves. On the contrary, she welcomed a solitary hour

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now and then, realizing that it is only at such times that the soul finds its truest nourishment and its strongest growth. She was sitting quietly, her hands relaxed in her lap, her gaze on the tiny dancing waves in the distance; when suddenly — as a thing from which no modern soul can hope to hide — an automobile appeared at the farther end of the long white strip of road.

“Dear me, I hope Félicie hasn’t taken into her head to tool down this hot day,” she thought. “There isn’t a thing in the house to eat — that she likes. But no; this is a red one. Hers is black.”

Down the road it tore like a wild thing; and, indeed, it was already beyond the control of its owner, who grasped the machine frantically with white, set face.

“It’s Dick Jarvis,” thought Nancy, recognizing an old friend of her husband’s. “How came he here?” and then she screamed and

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ran toward the road, where the great machine had rolled over in the dust and crashed into a stone wall just below the cottage. There was not a man on the place, Nancy having brought only two maids down with her. It was the mid-afternoon and the cottage stood many rods away from neighbors. At that hour all the men who resided within a quarter of a mile were in town, and the beach was deserted except for a few white-wrapped women. What should she do?

All this passed through Nancy's mind while she was reaching the gate. Once there, her gaze fell on the prostrate form of the man, who had been thrown from the huge machine which now lay upturned against an old apple-tree. She ran over to him. He was insensible, and she could discover no pulse.

She did not scream again. Instead she called the maids who were already peering

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from the back porch to see what was the matter.

“We must get him in and telephone for help,” she said as quietly as if this were an every-day occurrence. Her tone steadied the frightened girls, and they all three lifted him gently along the graveled path to the porch, where they placed him on a wicker settee in Nancy’s pet corner.

“Now go and telephone to Doctor Smith at the village as quickly as possible,” she said to the upper maid. “Then telephone Miss Norton and Philip Dexter. And you,” she turned to the other girl, “bring the salts and brandy — and don’t cry about it. There is no time for tears.”

She tried all her remedies, and put in practice what she could remember of her “First Aid to the Injured,” but to no avail. The man lay as immovable as a stone. In about half an hour the doctor came, bringing

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with him another man. Nancy retired while they examined Jarvis. But when she returned to the veranda, the men were standing idly beside the prostrate figure which they had covered with a light shawl that had lain on the back of Nancy's chair.

"The man is dead," said the doctor, simply. "Probably death was instantaneous. Can he — what shall we do about removing him?"

"Please carry him inside and into the little room off the reception hall," said Nancy. "He was an old friend of my husband's. I don't know where I can reach his friends, but I'll try."

She left them, remembering that his mother lived in one of the suburbs of the city. Dick, she recalled, had been away a long time. There had been a report that he was unhappily married. She could not remember the particulars, but she would try to get word to his mother.

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While she was looking up the number in the telephone book she heard a light step in the hall. She looked up, and there stood — Cordelia Graham.

CHAPTER XXI.

“WHERE is he?” exclaimed the newcomer, wildly.

“Who?” answered Nancy in her astonishment.

“Dick,” said Mrs. Graham. “Dick Jarvis. He has had a smash-up. Is he alive?”

“No,” Nancy answered, coldly. “What business had Cordelia Graham with Dick Jarvis? Why should she follow him here? “He is dead. The doctor has gone for men to help, and excuse me, please,—but I must find his mother’s address and telephone her at once.”

“His mother lives at Oaklawn Terrace, Bloomsbury. Her telephone number is 131-5,

Blooms. But you won't find her there. She is at Bar Harbor."

"Then we will send a message there," said Nancy, reaching for a telegraph blank.

"You mean that *you* will," answered Mrs. Graham, resenting the "we." "And now, I want to see him."

"He is in the room back of the reception-room, on the right," said Nancy, still wondering.

Mrs. Graham swept on toward the door indicated, but stopped just outside.

"Please go in with me," she pleaded in a faltering voice.

Nancy went over and took her hand. "Why should you go in there?" she said. "It will only distress you." For she could not realize that there was anything more than morbid curiosity behind Mrs. Graham's strange demeanor. But for answer she was pulled along into the room and up to the



“Why should you go in there?” she said. — Page 258.

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couch where the sheet-covered form lay so immovable, so awful in its stillness.

Mrs. Graham turned back the sheet with a trembling hand. Nancy noticed then that tears were trickling down her face, one dropping on the man's white forehead.

“Poor Dick!” said Mrs. Graham after a moment of silence. “Nancy Phayre, listen. Dick Jarvis was my husband. He came to Kentucky, once, a dozen years ago. We were both young then, and we fell violently in love. My people had planned a marriage for me with an old man — of course, a very wealthy man. It would have been better for me — and for poor Dick here — if they had succeeded in marrying me as they wished. But we were young and foolish. Dick quarrelled with my brothers about me, and finally one Sunday when he rode out to our plantation to see me, he was met by one of the boys, who shot at him. Dick fired back

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in self-defense, and the bullet went through my brother's heart. Then he ran away — an easy matter, for we lived on the edge of the mountain districts. When I found where he was, I ran off one night, walked ten miles alone in the dark, and joined him. We crossed the border together, were married and came to New York. Dick concealed our marriage for awhile and got the money from his people to take us abroad. We were happy together at first, but our natures were not compatible. Dick — well, he lies here dead, and I musn't say anything about his faults now. Poor Dick !”

“ But how did you know he was here ? ” asked Nancy.

“ Listen. We agreed to separate six years ago. He had inherited his grandfather's property, and I made him, or rather my lawyer did, settle an annual income on me, a sum that he could not touch. I reckon that

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is about all there is left of his property. I took my maiden name and lived abroad until nearly three years ago. When I came here, I tried to make up with his mother, but she hates me. She says I ruined Dick's life. Perhaps I did. Anyhow he ruined mine. Poor Dick!"

She stopped and laid her hand tenderly on his head.

"I forgive him now, though. I no longer love him, of course, but I feel as I would toward a naughty boy that has been too severely punished. He came back from Europe a month ago. He came to the Esplanade three days since. I have known where he was every day for six years, and what he was doing."

"Why did you not get a divorce?" cried Nancy, distressed at the painful story.

"He could not; *I* would not," was the answer. "Oh, yes, I know there have been

plenty who wanted to talk scandal about me, but I have been careful not to give any grounds for divorce. I would not give him that comfort. My name is really Jarvis, you understand. I only choose to be called Graham, instead."

"But how came you to follow him here?" persisted Nancy.

"He had been drinking hard for two days. This afternoon I heard that he had come off alone in an automobile; one with which I presumed he was not familiar. Half an hour later, Count de Beauvais tooled up and asked me to come out for a spin. I accepted, and we followed over the same road by which Dick came to his death. Poor fellow!"

For a moment they stood silent, each occupied with her own thoughts. Nancy looked out of the window and saw the Count pacing impatiently back and forth over the graveled path.

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“Does he know?” she asked.

“He knew us both in Paris,” was the answer. “Dick was rather jealous of him then. Yes, the Count knew why I chose to take this road to-day. I had to tell him.”

In a flash Nancy saw or felt, rather, Dick Jarvis's side of the story. An imprudent marriage; a silly young wife who was a born coquette; the opposition of his own people, who were of the old puritanic school; the reckless, irresponsible life they had led together; her numerous flirtations, with possible ones on his part; and now the miserable end.

“Poor fellow!” she echoed.

“Now, I have told you everything,” said Mrs. Graham, standing erect. “I did not mean to. You are the only person in this region who knows my story. Somehow, I owed it to you, since he lies here in your

house, — dead. But I'm going to exact a promise from you, — that you will consider it sacred. That you will never breathe it to any living soul."

"I promise you," said Nancy, "that I will never speak of it — unless I hear it first from others."

"You never will," answered Mrs. Graham. "If you were some woman I would make you swear it. But I know I can trust you."

"You may trust me," replied Nancy.

"And now," said Mrs. Graham, replacing the sheet over the still face of him for whom she had once broken all her family ties, whom she had made miserable for life, who had spoiled her own life, — "now, I am going away. I shall not appear in this matter at all. His mother and sister will come on and take charge of the funeral and all that. I am going to Atlantic City for a few weeks, until everything is over and settled."

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“But what if Mrs. Jarvis tries to find you?” asked Nancy. “You ought to attend the funeral.”

“She will never do that,” said Mrs. Graham with a short, hard laugh. “She could not bury him in peace if I were there. And why should I provoke a scandal at this time?”

“You may be right,” answered Nancy, slowly, “but somehow —”

“Good-by,” interrupted Mrs. Graham. “The Count is waiting, rather impatiently, I suspect.”

Nancy closed the door and watched her glide gracefully down the path, to where the Count stood beside his automobile. Her smile was cheerful, and with a light word or two she stepped into the tonneau and arranged her draperies elaborately around her. It was the last chapter in her life's tragedy, but she played it coolly as if she were on the “mimic stage.” The Count touched his

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hat to Nancy, jumped in, and they were off, a fast receding picture down the white stretch of road. And just then, the sable equipage of the undertaker drove into the grounds.

“What a strange woman!” thought Nancy. “She seems to have two natures; one all froth and gayety, the other, — well, she showed it to me this afternoon. I wonder which is the real woman? How miserable at heart she must be! Oh, what an unhappy creature any woman must be who is not true to herself!”

And then Hope and Dexter came in by the side entrance, with awestruck countenances and speaking in whispers. When the excitement of the afternoon had passed and the coroner and undertaker had gone away with their burden, Nancy was too much exhausted to stay below, on the veranda. She went to her room immediately after supper and began to disrobe. Hope ran up

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for a few minutes' chat, leaving Dexter alone with his cigar and his evening paper.

“When we reached the upper station this afternoon,” she said, “and while we were waiting there for the other train, I saw Cordelia Graham go by in an automobile. And who, do you imagine, was with her? You could never guess; it was the Count de Beauvais.”

“What is he back in this country for?” asked Nancy in a matter-of-fact voice, seeing Hope expected a reply of some sort. “Did you know he was here?”

“I saw his name in a Newport letter in the *Breeze* only this morning,” Hope answered. “I thought we had parted with him for good. I wonder just how much there is, or was, in the gossip about those two people, anyway. I wonder if they really are old friends. I'm not a curious old gossip,

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Nancy dear, but I must confess that I would like to know that woman's real story."

"And what is that but curiosity?" retorted Nancy with a smile. "But I think we may feel sure of one thing, that she deserves pity, more than blame; for I am sure she is far from being a happy woman."

"What makes you think that?" asked Hope.

"Oh, I feel it, somehow," was the reply. "Mrs. Graham seems to me like a woman who has just missed happiness, either through her own fault or that of some other; it matters little which. In either case, she deserves pity. Probably if we knew the whole story of her past life we should feel a sincere pity for her; as we should for any woman who has made a wretched botch of life."

"I suppose so," assented Hope. "But

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I should want to hear Mr. Graham's side, too — if there *is* a Mr. Graham."

"Oh, I think she is a widow, without doubt," said Nancy. "There is a great deal of good in her; let us remember that."

"No, let us not remember her at all, on such a night as this." And Hope rose to go down. "It's time I was thinking of Philip Dexter. He will wonder what has become of us all."

"I excused myself to him," answered Nancy. "I told him you would entertain him this evening. He seemed to be resigned. I think you will find him consolable," she added, dryly.

To which Hope did not reply. But when she reached the veranda where Dexter was stretched in a steamer chair, an unaccountable shyness came over her. She could think of nothing to say. She had relapsed into a monosyllabic creature without mind or will of

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her own. After a few desultory attempts at conversation, Dexter, too, fell into her mood, and they sat silent for a long time, with soft summer wind sighing around them, commingling the scent of the climbing honeysuckle and the sea.

After a time Hope felt the warm pressure of his hand upon hers as it lay on the arm of her chair. But she made no effort to throw it off or to answer the pressure. She was in the Isles of the Blessed, alone with him, and there was no desire to escape. The waters lapped the shore in soft-repeated harmonies, a little bird in the shrubbery twittered a sleepy song on its nest, the darkness grew deeper and softer outside; but Philip was coming nearer and nearer to her soul. And then he seemed to be the only presence in the world. She neither desired or tried to think of anything else in the world but Philip, — Philip, — Philip.

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By and by, they heard a clock chime out the hour of ten; but neither spoke, only their hands clasped closer. The silent moments flew and the half-hour was tinkled from Nancy's clock up-stairs. Hope made a movement as if to rouse herself; but his hand pulled her back and she yielded. At eleven, she broke the spell and rose:

“We really must go now, it's late.”

“Not now,” he whispered. “Come down on the beach, one moment.”

They walked down the path together, her hand still in his. It was her first venture into Paradise.

When they reached the beach, his arm was around her. They paced a few steps and he stopped, drawing her closer to him.

“You must know, Hope. You are the only woman in the world,” he said, softly.

And she put her hands on his shoulders

and looked into his eyes, there in the light of the late-rising moon.

“ Yes,” she said.

It was twelve when Hope crept up-stairs, trying not to wake Nancy. But in vain. Nancy had been restless, and now she called to Hope to come in.

“ Where on earth have you been? ” asked Nancy.

“ Why, just on the piazza,” answered Hope, rather consciously. “ And down on the beach.”

“ Oh, I thought he would prove consolable,” laughed Nancy.

But Hope only blushed and ran away to her own room. She could not talk of this new and wonderful happiness yet.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN the following days Nancy thought a great deal about Cordelia Graham.

“How much easier my own sorrow was,” she told herself. “George and I were comfortable together, and I had everything to be thankful for. All things were done decently and in order. But what should I have done, how could I have borne it, to see him dead, perhaps by his own design, and not be able to acknowledge myself as his wife and widow before the world? We seldom stop to consider other people’s troubles and compare them with our own. We should be much happier if we did. Poor Mrs. Graham! I am going to be particularly kind to her after this.”

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But about three weeks later she went to Bar Harbor for a week's change and rest, and was astonished to see Cordelia Graham enter the hotel dining-room, attired in a fresh blue linen gown, with red roses on her picture hat, trailing a white parasol at her side, and she found it difficult to patronize the woman.

Mrs. Graham caught sight of her as she came down the aisle and nodded airily.

"I thought you were in Atlantic City," said Nancy, as Cordelia paused by her table.

"It was so stupid down there," answered Mrs. Graham. "Besides, the Jarvises went there for a change of scene," she whispered. "Of course, they didn't know I was there. And I wasn't for long, after I saw their names on the register. Well, good-by. I'll see you again."

And she passed on to a seat which was

being kept for her by the Count de Beauvais.

Mrs. Blake, coming in a moment later, spied them there together.

“Do you know,” she said in a low tone, across the table, “I begin to think the Count has ‘intentions’ there, and still I don’t suppose she has any money. And counts must be paid for as a rule.”

“Oh, they are old friends,” said Nancy, carelessly. “She told me she knew him well in London — or Paris, was it? But what do you think? I had a letter this morning, asking me if I would serve on the State Board of Charities. I am very proud. If I say ‘yes,’ I shall be appointed next Monday.”

“Then you will say ‘yes’?” asked Mrs. Blake.

“Why, of course,” answered Nancy. “So much for the recognition of what we have done in Quex.”

“It will demand much of your time,” said Mrs. Blake.

“Perhaps,” answered Nancy. “But I am bound to give most of my time to philanthropy, anyway. This appointment will only broaden the field, and it makes my heart ache when I realize how many are the voices all over our land that are crying for help.”

“But you are going back to housekeeping this autumn,” urged Mrs. Blake. “Don’t overdo the thing, and have nervous prostration.”

“If you’ll remember,” answered Nancy, “I didn’t give up housekeeping because there was too much to do, but because there were not enough to do for. And don’t call it going back. It’s going forward, for I shall never be selfish or self-centred again, please God. Think of what the club has been to me. The best it can do for any woman is to lift her out of herself.”

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“ And sometimes the best of us need that,” replied Mrs. Blake, earnestly.

When they left the table and strolled out on the piazza of the great hotel, the first person whom they met was Senator Vanderwater, who came toward them with both hands cordially extended.

“ So delighted, my dear Mrs. Phayre,” he began. “ This is a pleasure, indeed. Mrs. Blake, I’d no idea — ”

Which was scarcely true, as he had heard of their coming only the day before, sitting in his office at home. He brought chairs and placed them in the pleasantest corner for the ladies, and for the next hour did his best to entertain them, planning various little excursions about the island for their benefit. But when they finally reached their own connecting rooms, Nancy said with considerable decision :

“ Now, second-mother-mine, don’t you

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leave me alone with that man, not for a moment.”

And thus she obtained peace during her stay on Mount Desert Island.

In another week they were back again, Nancy settling herself into her various lines of work with the keenest zest. September had come, bringing cool nights and opaline tints across the water. But Nancy closed her cottage early to open the town house, and was buried in the intricacies of house-cleaning and “doing over” and “getting settled” for another month. By the time October had come she had made the old place fresh and bright again, keeping it fragrant and gay with flowers. It seemed so comfortable to be at home again that she would pace the floor when alone, hugging herself with delight in her possession of that best place on earth—home. She had lain aside the last vestige of mourning, too, and the brighter colors she

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wore seemed to reflect themselves in her mood. She still grieved for the mother who had been so much to her; her arms still ached for the baby they had held such a pitifully short time. But she allowed herself no vain regret. And the development that had been going on in her own soul — and which she now knew would have come, inevitably, sooner or later — had taught her that there was a deeper love than that she had entertained for her husband; and that her heart yearned for a truer, nobler love than his had ever been for her. She dreaded to be untrue to his memory, and yet she realized that they two had only skimmed lightly over the surface of the smiling sea of deepest love between man and woman. And so, when she thought of George, she only sighed and said, tenderly:

“We were both so young and we did not know.”

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With October came thoughts of the club season. There was much to be done, and the reports that were being made ready showed that the town was already much the better for what had been accomplished. The vacation schools had been carried on successfully the second summer with a larger attendance than before; the playgrounds had kept several hundred children off the street, and the chief of police, who had given his support grudgingly the first summer, now produced statistics proving that the percentage of juvenile crime had decreased fifty per cent. in the districts where the schools and playgrounds were located.

As chairman of the committee on vacation schools, Félicie Dean made the report at the October meeting. After giving some of the above facts she continued: "When we consider the evolution of our club during the past two years, it is enough to take one's

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breath away to recall that then the word 'culture' comprehended our broadest meaning, and a book was our symbol. One would imagine that society had no ailment, spiritual or moral, that could not be relieved by a good strong dose of culture, administered in a book capsule. Dooley's picture of Carnegie handing out a library to a starving man on his back door-step would have served as a portrait of our club idea. Do you remember the 'yard of roses' and 'yard of pansies,' those popular gift lithographs that once cemented the friendship of women for their favorite journal? Well, the papers read at our old-time club occasions were like that,—sentimentally rounded periods, interspersed with flowery quotations and set in formal rows, a yard, if not two or more tiresome yards, in length. But now, we may begin to congratulate ourselves a little. We have dropped culture, with a big C, and taken up

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scholarships, kindergartens, and civic betterments, music and art, domestic science, patriotic endeavor, work for home and schools, and for that unfortunate element that has known neither good homes nor schools. Quex has awakened to the fact that the progress of the world does not depend on the acquirement of a little more culture on the part of a limited number of fairly well-educated women, but on the amount of leavening those women are enabled to impart to the masses. We are no longer alarmed at the sound of such words as 'immorality' and 'reform,' for we are conscious that to do the work we must meet facts as they exist. Madam President, I congratulate you on the work that Quex is doing to-day."

When the hand-clapping that followed these remarks had subsided, Mrs. Blake arose.

"Madam President," she began, "while I would detract nothing from the splendid

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work which Quex is doing, I must say a word for the old club. The self-culture club has served its purpose in awakening women to existing conditions and to the true remedy; the present club spirit as evidenced in the altruism of our various lines of work, dealing with the root of evil, proves that the club movement is not a fad with us, but a splendid force for righteousness whose future is intertwined with the destiny of nations. As for instance: If any class of women is capable of grasping the fact that domestic service can only be elevated by first elevating the employer's conscience and the employer's intelligence, that class is to be found among club-women. They have learned the value of reciprocal relations better than any other class, except, perhaps, college women. The sense of justice which club life develops is one of its most valuable functions. To apply principles is harder than to acquire them,

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of course. If to do were only as easy as to know what were good to be done! But all this has come to us as a development from the former condition; and there are many of us who will always maintain that those quiet years, when we Quex members were studying and reading and discussing things in a quiet way, were necessary to our present accomplishment. We were in the chrysalis stage, perhaps; but as full-winged butterflies we cannot afford to ignore it."

Mrs. Blake received her share of applause, also, although a keen observer might have noticed that it came from the older women.

But the most interesting report of the summer's work came from the new civic and legislative committee. Theirs was work that told effectively for good government and right principles of action. "By far the most important work we have undertaken is the non-partisan effort to encourage good citizen-

ship," said Mrs. Blake, as chairman. " We have made a complete revision of the assessors' lists used in municipal elections. In some of the branches the work was done by members of the association, but in most cases it was done by paid canvassers. The coöperation of several church clubs and classes of young men and boys was also secured. In a single division of one ward thirty-eight names were stricken from the list. Of these, two were voters who had died, two were not naturalized, and the rest had moved. Forty-nine names were added to the list. In most cases the assessors gladly accepted the aid and correction of our committee. We are also distributing election circulars. Neither of these tasks seemed so difficult as we once thought, and I think more women are beginning to realize that although much work may be done to better existing conditions, the root of the trouble

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lies in the election of the right man to fill the offices. And we are using our influence to interest and educate the voters to a stronger sense of duty in casting their votes, and taking a broader interest in municipal and public affairs. And right here our work is going to tell."

And so Nancy saw the club season open with a quiet, earnest enthusiasm that promised more good for the community than the louder-voiced, more ambitious kind that is sometimes mistaken for zeal. But the great event of the autumn was to be the opening of Neighborhood House.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT same evening Nancy was sitting before her open fire again when her maid entered with the announcement that Senator Vanderwater was below.

“Alas for the plans of mice and women,” thought Nancy as she rose to go down. “I meant to have a quiet evening all to myself,” — but once in the drawing-room she greeted him with the graceful tact which had won her many friends.

“I’m glad to see you once again in your own house,” said the Senator, when they were comfortably seated. “Somehow you look out of place at a hotel.”

“I cannot tell you how glad I am to be back,” answered Nancy. “I begin to think

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I am not one of the women who can be happy in hotels. Home is the best place for women, after all."

"Ha-a-a!" said the Senator, and his tone smacked of triumph. "I always thought you would come to it. Confess, now, honestly. Aren't you tired of all this publicity?"

"What publicity?" asked Nancy, per-versely.

"Why — er — this standing in the public eye, as it were," explained the Senator; "your clubs and philanthropies and all that."

"Not a bit," was the cheerful reply. "Not a bit. Why should you ask?"

"But you are so heartily glad to be back in your own place," he continued. "You are the kind of woman to ornament the home—not the club rostrum. You ought—"

"And why not both?" Nancy broke in recklessly, to ward off if possible what she

knew would come sooner or later. "Why may not a woman decorate — or is ornament the word? — the club rostrum as well as her home? Both, by all means, I say."

"Nancy Phayre, you know what I mean," said the Senator, firmly. "You cannot evade it. Will you, or will you not marry me?"

"Senator Vanderwater, I have never admired you more than at this moment. No — no," and she drew her hand away and hid it behind her. "Notice I said *admired*."

"That is not answering my question," he persisted, quietly. "Will you or will you not?"

"I fear not," and Nancy drew a long sigh. "You see, we think so differently on most of the important questions of life."

"That would serve to add a zest to life," he answered.

"On mere ethical or intellectual questions, perhaps, the chance for argument might lend

a fillip to existence," said Nancy. "But we should differ radically on every detail of conduct. You want a woman who will make your comfort and your home her sole aim in life; who will borrow her ideas from you; who will care for society only as your wife; who will gladly consent to shine with a borrowed light — as the wife of Senator Vanderwater — all her days."

"But you were that as Mrs. George Phayre," said the Senator.

"Possibly," answered Nancy. "Probably. But the last two years of my life have made another woman of me. Rather they have developed the woman that lay dormant previous to George Phayre's death. I question, sometimes," she continued, as if talking to herself, "whether if he had lived I should not have developed the same way, a little later on, perhaps. Then I should have been so radically different from the woman, or

girl, he married that we should never have been happy together."

"Pshaw," urged the Senator. "You'd have been all right if George Phayre'd lived. He'd have kept you where you belonged — in the ranks of happy, retiring, unambitious married women."

The Senator could not see the dangerous flash beneath Nancy's eyelids; but he could feel the coldness in her tones as she replied:

"It is not for any man to assume — or presume — to keep me where I belong."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Phayre," apologized the Senator. "I did not mean—"

"Never mind," said Nancy. "Listen to me. As you say, I am preëminently a woman for the home. There is nothing sweeter on earth to the right-minded woman than her home and her home ties. I love this home of mine better than anything else on earth. But that is no reason why I should sit down

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selfishly in it and not lift a finger for any other interest. I shall never neglect my home again. I shall keep it as my castle, sacred from too many outside cares. But I have come to realize that in the world are thousands of less fortunate women, alas! yes, millions of them. There is an army of little children growing up in ignorance and poverty and vice. There are municipal conditions and educational conditions that fairly cry aloud for the help of good women. These calls I shall always hear and always respond to. These are the things club-women do. You can laugh at club-women all you choose to, Senator. They are behind every reform, back of every good work. And I am proud to stand with them."

"I expect you'll be an out-and-out suffragist yet, Nancy," he said, testily. "You'll be a full-fledged voter."

"I may," answered Nancy, calmly.

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“And I may not. But in the meantime, before that question is ever settled, there are scores of things waiting for the women of this fair country to do; and I shall certainly try to do my full share of them. And that’s the kind of wife you would marry if I said ‘yes,’ Senator,” she concluded, softly. “And really, I think too highly of you as a friend — as George’s friend — to wish to bring misery on you.”

“Oh, not misery,” urged the Senator, rather faintly.

“Yes, misery,” answered Nancy, firmly. “That is what it would amount to. I should persist in doing the things you dislike most in women — or wives, rather; for you will continue to like me for a friend.” She held out her hand to him now. But he rose, saying:

“You have at least given me something to think of. Good night.”

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And as he drew near the great hotel which contained his own luxurious and perfectly appointed bachelor apartments, he spoke again under his breath:

“By George. She’s right! That woman’s always right. She’d make a most unhappy, jealous, and miserable husband of me. I’ll keep her as a friend.”

When he arrived home there lay a perfumed note on his table. Breaking it open he read:

“*My dear Senator:*

“*Would it be possible for you to run over and see me a few moments this evening? Say at nine? I want to consult you about what is to me a most important matter. You will do a greater favor than you can imagine to*

“*Yours faithfully,*

“CORDELIA GRAHAM.”



A. L. Jacobs

Mrs. Graham met him at the door. — *Page 295.*

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He looked at the timepiece on his mantel. It was only a quarter of nine. He rose, took his hat and coat and went out again.

Mrs. Graham met him at her door, arrayed in a charming tea-gown, which seemed to be constituted of froth and foaminess and sea-green tints.

“ My dear Senator,” she began in caressing tones. “ Come in. So good of you to come. I certainly shall never forget your kindness to me. Right in here, please,” and she led the way into a small but tastefully arranged library. When he was comfortably seated she led the talk along the common lines of weather and health and mutual friends for awhile. Then, her voice growing confidential, Mrs. Graham moved nearer the Senator, and said:

“ I wanted to speak to you, both as a lawyer and as my friend to-night. You *are* my friend, aren't you? ” She paused and looked coyly at him.

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“Certainly; no one could admire you more,” he replied with a judicious commingling of the lawyer with the friend.

“I trust so,” she rippled on. “But you see there is some one, Senator, who cares — that is, who wishes to marry me. That of course, is rather beyond your admiration, and — er — your friendship.” There was the slightest imperceptible pause before she went on. “This person has money — a good deal of it. Yes — and position.”

“Then what is lacking?” asked the Senator, somewhat bluntly. For as he spoke he realized that money and position would have been the last thing to enter into Nancy Phayre’s head; and that they were the only considerations mentioned by his fair hostess.

“Nothing,” answered Mrs. Graham. “Only — I thought — I am fond of my own country. I would hardly care to live abroad,” which, had he thought of it, would

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have seemed singular in one who had chosen to live so many years in Europe.

“And would you have to? May I ask who the favored one is to be?” asked the Senator.

“Not ‘favored,’ Senator. Not as yet. If you —” but she hesitated and seemed confused.

The Senator did not play up to her leading as she had expected him to do. “The Count de Beauvais honors me with the offer of his heart and hand.”

“Say rather that you will honor the Count de Beauvais with yours,” said the gallant Senator. “I am sure any man, even royalty itself, might consider himself honored,” and he bent low in her direction. “I am sure if *I* were a marrying man —”

“Are you sure you are not?” she flashed back, as he hesitated.

“Oh, quite sure,” he said, steadily. “The

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habits of a lifetime—and all that, you know. Even if I were, I should hesitate to enter the lists with a real live count—with landed estates I believe you said?”

“Yes,” she murmured, “with landed estates, and a sure enough title. Still—”

“Then, my dear lady,” answered the Senator, rising, “take him by all means. A real live count who adores you, as I am sure he does, as all we humbler Americans do, is not to be refused. And I shall hope to visit you in your chateau next summer—may I not? I shall hasten to extend my congratulations to Beauvais.”

“Oh, not yet, dear Senator. I beg of you not to say anything to the Count until the engagement is announced. It is irregular, you know, in France,” she explained.

“Certainly not, then. I could not refuse anything you asked of me, you know. Good night,” but he hurried down the steps and

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along the quiet street away from the house; for he knew that she had almost asked and he had almost refused something of the most vital importance to them both.

He heard nothing more from her until late in November, when, on taking up his morning paper, he read, in flaring head-lines, the marriage of Mrs. Cordelia Graham, once Mrs. Richard Jarvis, and former candidate for School Committee, to the Count de Beauvais. And as the rather flamboyant article read, "the couple would soon depart for the sunny south of France, where they would dwell on the magnificent estate which had been occupied by a long line of distinguished ancestors."

It happened to be the very day when Neighborhood House was to have its last bit of finishing, preparatory to the opening that evening. Félicie and Nancy went down in the afternoon to see that all was ready, and

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naturally fell to discussing the international marriage.

“For my part,” said Félicie, “I’m glad she has gone to France. She’s much better fitted to be a countess than a club-woman. I feared she would capture the Senator. And old-fashioned as he is, I hated to see him sacrificed.”

“Félicie,” said Nancy, suddenly, “why don’t you take the Senator?”

“No, thank you,” answered Félicie. “The Senator and I are not for each other. We are an ideal bachelor and bachelor woman. I’d hate to spoil it. Besides, he hasn’t asked me.”

“I suppose you have an ideal bachelor maid in your mind which you think you must live up to,” said Nancy. “You’d be a lot happier if you were married.”

“Not to the wrong man,” answered Félicie. “But let us not get to the everlasting woman question. I hate it.”

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“ I agree with you on that score,” said Nancy. “ Married or single, it would be a good thing if for a considerable time to come nothing whatever were talked or written about women or the relation of the sexes. Women are continually under the microscope, and when they are not being criticized or approved by men they are being reviled or extolled by their own sex. This everlasting thrusting of woman to the front has brought about a great deal of the misunderstanding between the sexes and is the cause of most of the modern feminine discontent.”

“ Here comes Parker Clayton, — to change the subject,” said Félicie, suddenly. “ He wants to talk over the evening’s programme with you, and I must go home now. He’ll walk home with you.”

And so Clayton walked through the vacant rooms with Nancy, and they planned together for the hundredth time what should be done

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with them and in them; how they should be made to contribute to the happiness and well-being of the young people who were to use them. It was dusk when they finally came out, with the last workman to leave the place. And they walked together through the gathering dusk toward the stately house which had sheltered three generations of Nancy's people.

“Come in to dinner,” she said as they reached the door. “I am alone and you can go from here as well as from the Settlement House.”

He went in, as a matter of course, and they dined together, alone. Afterwards she went up-stairs to change her gown while he sat in the library to read and rest awhile. She came down early, all clad in white, and sat for a little by the open grate. The firelight glowed on her delicate cheek and lent added softness to her glowing eyes.



This, she realized was the true meaning of love. — Page 303.

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Clayton looked up to speak; but a sudden mist clouded his vision. He reached out his hand.

“Nancy,” he whispered, “I love you.”

For answer, she put her own hand in his. This, she realized, was the true meaning of love, — perfect sympathy, perfect understanding. They sat quietly for a few moments. He was the first to break the silence.

“I never meant to tell you, Nancy,” he said. “I thought I was strong enough to bear it alone.”

“And make me bear it alone, too?” she asked. “It would have been harder on me than on you.”

“Why?” he asked, surprised.

“Because I am a woman,” she answered. “A man has so many other avenues of enjoyment, so many ways of forgetting are open to him; and then, too, his nature is

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different. But it is a trite saying that a woman's love is everything. Why should you not tell me?"

"Nancy, I am a poor man," he began.

"As if that could make any difference," she retorted. "Besides it is because you gave all you had to the poor."

"And you —?"

"I shall not give all," she answered, divining the thought in his mind. "You must not expect that. I have thought a great deal about these things of late."

"And conclude?" he said, as she hesitated.

"This," she answered. "There is nothing so dear to the human being as home. You and I love each other; therefore we want to live together, — we want a home together. We are working for the amelioration of the masses, and first of all we shall teach them the value of the home. How can we do it

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better than by letting them see that we value our home above everything else? We have no right to sacrifice our home and all that makes it ideal to us, and then expect them to idealize their own."

"But I had imagined rather," he said, "that your two years of experiment had led you to just the opposite conclusion."

"On the contrary," answered she, "it makes me resent the imputation that the club-woman is not the home-woman. I want to keep on with all my public endeavor; I want to give up nothing. But I want most of all to keep my house open, to make a home for you in it, where you shall find rest and strength and courage for the work that lies ahead of us."

Clayton raised her hand to his lips. "You are right," he said. "That is to be a helpmeet in the truest sense, Nancy, — my Nancy."

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He stooped down and kissed her.

And then they went forth together, down to Neighborhood House, among the people, — their people.

THE END. 12

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